



BIRD GODS

by  
Charles de Koon

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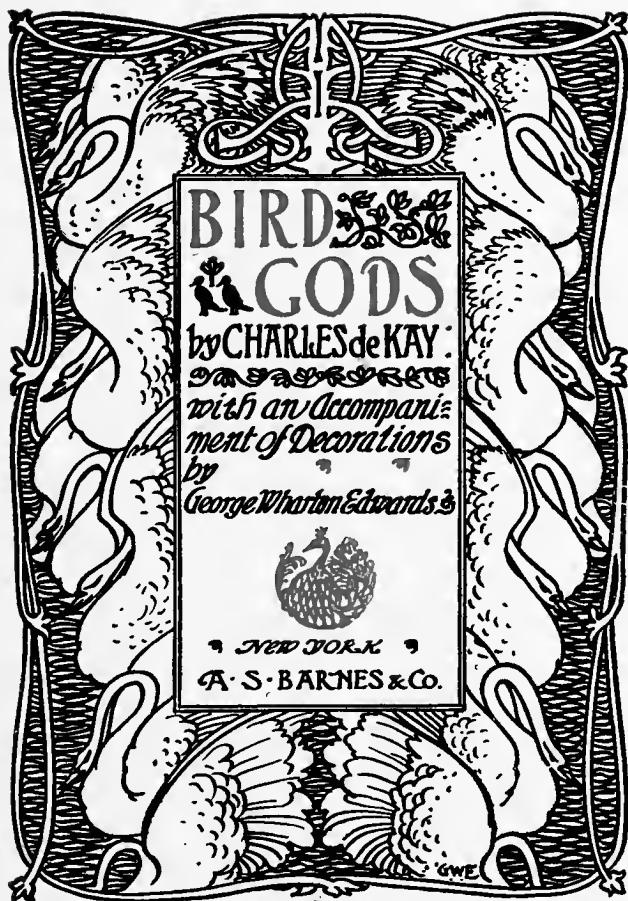
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BY CHARLES DE KAY





TO THE MEMORY OF  
JAMES ELLSWORTH DE KAY  
AUTHOR OF  
*"The Zoölogy of the State of New York"*







## PREFACE

**E**ARLY men endowed with keen faculties of observation found the regular return of birds to their haunts mysterious. A closer watch on their habits revealed a forethought, a method, a genius for work, an industry that astound the naturalists of our day; certain actions of birds gave the men of old warrant to concede them powers of prophecy. To

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primitive men, and to men long after civilization was strong, such traits and powers suggested beings that need never die; they readily conceived of souls as birds and birds as supernatural creatures.

In the study of man's groping toward religious belief one factor has been much neglected: the influence of birds and beasts on what may be called prehistoric religion. Yet in the daily life of primitive men and savages these were and are as important as more striking objects in the sky, such as sun, moon and stars, rainbow and northern light, dawn and sunset, thunderstorm and the winds. Is it not a fair question to ask, whether the primitive mind did not first invest the world of animals with mystery, because they are objects near at hand, within their limited horizon, and only afterward rise to the point of grasping the heavenly bodies as beings endowed with supernatural power?

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In his work on the origin of mythology (Berlin, 1860) Dr. Schwartz contemplates the movement as one from heaven to earth, as if men worshipped the heavenly phenomena first, then brought them to earth and personified them in animals. His favorite example is the lightning, symbolized as dragon or snake. Might not the movement have been the other way?

The tracks of the worship of birds and beasts are much dimmer, more overlaid by worship of larger things. The spirits and gods perceived in celestial and atmospheric bodies are of a loftier, more civilized sort, more truly godlike; while those that retained their bird-like or animal characteristics have come down to us very often in the lower form of demigods or heroes. Adam of Bremen says that the Lithuanians sacrificed unblemished slaves to dragons and birds; under dragon we find the fire-breathing winged creature, a transition from

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the simple bird to a more complex creature representing lightning, tempest and the sun.

Odd enough to arrest the attention, at least, that many gods, goddesses, and demigods in Greek and Roman mythology have certain birds or beasts connected with them, without obvious reason for such association! And if one looks at the mythology and religious systems, the epics and legends of other peoples, not excepting the Judæo-Christian, one finds a similar condition of things, varying in degree of clearness. Even Christianity retains the dove associated with the Holy Ghost, the eagle, bull and lion, emblems of evangelists; other instances will occur to readers of the New Testament.

I wish to call attention to remains in the early lore of Europe of a very extensive connection of birds with gods, pointing to a worship of the bird itself as the living representative of a god, or else to such a position

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of the bird toward a deity as to fairly permit the inference that at a period still more remote the bird itself was worshipped. One may only guess how near the primitive Europeans of that period were to the condition of the savage to-day who worships the bird which is the totem of his clan, and never slays it save on certain occasions when its death is accompanied by religious rites.



I follow in mythology and epic poetry and legends the traces of certain birds, the eagle, the swan, the woodpecker, the cuckoo, the owl, the peacock, the dove, and try to show how their peculiarities and habits, observed by primitive man with the keenness of savages, have laid the foundation for certain elements in various religions and mythologies, and sometimes furnished through the peculiarities of the creature's habits or character the skele-

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ton plots on which a host of legends and tragedies have been built by the imagination of poet-priests and poet-historians of the early days.

I hope to have opened up some new vistas into the meaning of various figures on classic ground — Venus, Pan, Pallas Athené, Picus, Kuknos, Sappho, Achilleus, Odysseus, Oidipous, Orpheus, Æneas — and at the same time thrown light on leading figures in the great epics of the world — the Iliad and Odyssey, the Mahabharata, the Shah Nameh, the Kalevala and Kalevipoeg — and upon various characters used by the playwrights of Greece in their most famous dramas.

There seems ever more reason for a belief which many scholars still shrink from accepting, namely, that the living races of Europe still contain in their compound the strains of races now apparently remote or only found in odd corners of the world. It becomes ever



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harder to believe the stories of old historians about the eradication of subject races by conquerors on any large scale ; flight on the part of the vanquished must have been usually followed by a speedy return, with consequent readjustment of the population.

The Lapp, the Finn, the Turk, for example, are not confined to northeastern Europe and the lands by the Black Sea and Bosphorus ; they are everywhere present as a strain in the so-called Aryan races. The Kelt exists in Germany, but Germanized ; the ancient Briton is found in purest Anglo-Saxondom. Their tongues are gone, leaving more or less traces behind, which philology has not yet begun to disentangle ; but they remain as important parts of the ethnic mixtures which call themselves by various rough-and-ready names, like English, German, French, Italian, Greek. Myths and old beliefs reveal the influence of non-Aryan races on Europe. Physical and

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mental traits contribute to show that their blood still prevails in their old habitats, whence they were never totally expelled, where, on the contrary, they remained, to gradually mingle more or less completely with their conquerors, or the people they conquered. For often, as in the raids of the Huns, it was the ruder race that overcame the more advanced. Their presence is attested by place-names, and by names of gods and heroes, as well as by other words in living tongues which cannot be satisfactorily explained by "Aryan" roots. In some cases that presence is attested by grammatical peculiarities belonging to the non-Aryan tongues.

Gubernatis says with great truth : " It is by no means true that the ancient systems of mythology have ceased to exist ; they have only been diffused and transformed." And he quotes, from Spiegel's edition of *Rasavâhini* of India, a passage which directly affirms the

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worship of animals and assigns a reason for it :  
“Even the beasts remember the services once rendered them ; and when we implore them they do not desert us, for they know what has happened.”

While drawing attention to the bird gods of ancient Europe, I do not wish to be accused of allowing one theory to run away with me. No one can be more conscious that many threads unite in a god or popular hero. I do not contend that all gods of old were bird gods, nor even that the popular conceptions of those here treated were built solely from the traits of the bird in question. Sometimes two birds of separate natures seem to blend in one god or hero, as when he gets his name from one bird, but some of his traits from another.



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As soon as the bird or beast became humanized, many other influences began their play; reactions took place which sometimes ended in a total forgetfulness, on the part of worshippers, as to the origin of the god or hero, and the relegation of the bird to a symbol, or adjunct, the meaning of which had become completely lost. So remote might the connection become, that near and obvious explanations were cast aside for strained, fantastic etymologies. Such was the fate of the hero-demigod Cuchullaind, a form of Fion of Ireland and of Väinämöinen of Finland. Amongst other curious developments in forms like these I offer an explanation of that strangest of fancies among savage and primitive men, the *couvade*; I am not aware that its origin has ever been satisfactorily pointed out before.

While a realization of the presence in the ethnic mixtures of Europe and America of

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racés now despised may occasion some twinges to the pride of the "Aryan" or the "Caucasian" (obsolete term!) and while the certainty that religions of the highest grade have passed through lowly stages of growth is not favorable to intellectual hauteur, nay, is painful to devout believers, yet such conclusions may at least have some compensation, by causing us to feel the solidarity of mankind, by begetting in us charity toward those who, by the widest stretch of courtesy, cannot be included in the aristocracy of the Aryan and the Semite. After all, even those who are not heirs to the religions of Moses, Buddha, Christ, or Mohammed are men! It can do no harm to recall once more that our remote ancestors were immersed in the same sea of superstitious fears that make the life of lowly races a constant struggle with nightmares and urge them to crimes from which a natural kindly instinct revolts.

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Again, recollection of what our ancestors thought of birds and beasts, of how at one time they prized and idealized them, may induce in us, their descendants, some shame at the extermination to which we are consigning these lovable but helpless creatures, for temporary gains or sheer brutal love of slaughter. The sordid men who swept from North America the buffalo, the gentlemen who brag of moose and elephants slain, the ladies who demand birds for their hats and will not be denied, the boys who torture poor feathered singers and destroy their nests, are more ruthless than the primeval barbarians. The latter stayed their hands at times through religious scruples, even though their stomachs might be empty. The marvellous tale of the share birds have had in the making of myth, religion, poetry and legend may do somewhat to soften these flinty hearts and induce men to establish and carry out laws to protect especially the

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birds. Unless this is done, and done speedily, the whole earth will soon become a desert without melody, given over to the insect world, like some lands about the Mediterranean, where no wild animal can exist and no gracious bird dares to raise its cheering song.







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## **Bird Gods in Ancient Europe**





## CHAPTER I

*“ There was the Douvé with her Eyen Meeke ”*

I SHALL never forget the first wild pigeon I shot. It was in a grove near Lenox where I found the lovely bird, brave in its nuptial plumage and ignorant of the ruthlessness of a boy with the first gun he ever called his own in his hands. Against the dark trunk of a pine-tree the pigeon was a shining mark and it allowed me to come within gunshot before showing signs of uneasiness. The beautiful colors of its neck only made me more

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eager to lay it low; its musical plaint, as it called to its mate, did not charm my savage breast. I fired. As the creature fell like a piece of clay, I bounded forward with a wild joy at my prowess and picked up the still quivering body from the carpet of pine-needles where it lay.

Then I was sorry. Not that I at all realized the enormity of the act. Not that I dreamed that I should live to see this exquisite, innocent, useful creature, and a hundred other species of songsters, insect-eaters, warblers gone from the woods and fields they enlivened and benefited, massacred by thousands, netted, their nests robbed and destroyed, their colonies annihilated! But for a moment I had a glimmer of the truth. Because it was thought by other boys manly to have a gun and hit to kill, because thousands of men boasted of the "bags" they had made, I was doing the same thing, destroying for the sake of slaughter without the sting of necessity. Even then it



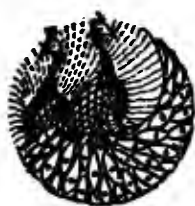
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struck me that the bird I had seen the moment before resplendent in the sun was no longer so beautiful. Its feathers seemed to fall from the limp body at a touch. Its eye, that was lustrous when I picked it up, was glassed and tarnished. Had it not been for a silly pride which forbade me going home empty-handed, I should have dug a hole and covered up my bird, dimly conscious that I had done a wrong.

Probably it was a clearer idea of what lay at the bottom of this obscure repulsion that made me indifferent to shooting, whilst liking nothing in the world so much as haunting woods and streams, watching wild beasts and birds and reading books on natural history. But the strain of life soon took hold on me and left little leisure for such things. The old love for animate creation followed me, however, among ancient and outlandish languages. Perhaps that is why I have found in strange corners of mythology and philology various clues to odd phenomena among ancient myths.

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Why, I asked myself, should certain birds have been allotted to certain gods and goddesses in the Greek and Roman mythology? Why should the eagle go with Zeus, the peacock with Hera, the dove with Venus, the swan with Apollo, the woodpecker with Ares,



the owl with Pallas Athené?

It could not be mere chance that so many gods and goddesses had each their attendant bird; the attribution was too regular; it was done too much on a system. What was the original meaning of it all?

Aphrodité, drawn in a chariot to which doves are harnessed, is the goddess of spring, of that season when the male dove shines in his finest feather and makes himself even more ardent in his courtship than before. She is the goddess of love-making. Doves are forever making love and caressing each other. Chaucer speaks of "the wedded turtil with her hearté trewe." The male struts and cooes and, unrebuffed by

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her indifference, follows closely his beloved. So the bird is by its nature and habits well fitted to be the attendant and symbol of love and the goddess of love — better fitted indeed than the sparrow, which is sometimes given to Venus, because of its demonstrative amative-ness, but, owing to its quarrelsome disposition, is much less appropriate than the dove. It is the gentle disposition of the dove that may have helped to influence the earliest Christians to make use of the dove as a symbol of peace and good-will to men, in contrast to the rapacious bird of Jove and the sinister, bloodthirsty little attendant on Minerva. But neither the early Christian use of the dove as an emblem, nor the pagan way of placing it as a symbol beside Venus, explains to satisfaction what such an alliance meant.

There is mournfulness in the cry of the dove and there was a funereal use of the dove as a symbol of mourning, if not distinctly of the life beyond the grave. Aphrodité herself and the

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worship of Venus seem just the opposite of death ; moreover it is very hazardous to imagine that to any wide or popular extent among the old peoples such an idea could find entrance as that the giving of life includes the taking away of life, and therefore that a goddess of fertility includes the idea of a goddess of death. Such abstract ideas were undoubtedly familiar to philosophers at remote epochs, but what is doubtful is the possibility of a general use of any symbol representing such ideas among the people.

Italy seems to have retained some of the earliest ideas common to the myths of Greece, Asia Minor and the Ægean Islands, just as it affords some of the earliest alphabets of the Ægean region which have disappeared from the East. One might readily argue that before the Greek tribes took possession of Greece and the Etruscans of large parts of Italy the great peninsulas which form those two countries, together with most of the islands, were inhab-

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ited by a race somewhat homogeneous. We learn to call these earlier swarms the Pelasgians—a name wherein some old critics have guessed, by the common interchange of *r* with *s*, the word Pelargians, or the people of the storks; and they have given gratuitously the explanation that the Pelasgians were so called because they were of a roving nature and came and went like the storks.



However that might have been—and the absolute impossibility of the explanation will be greatly weakened when we find bird names under many famous names of gods—we know that a section of the Pelasgians or Pelargians was in alliance with Priam of Troy and that in the Greek period many were still living in Epirus about Dodona—the famous place for oracles delivered through the sounds of an oak grove and

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of doves sacred to Zeus, who was called Pelasgic in consequence.

It is at Dodona that the dove appears in human form and thus gives us one clew to its connection with Venus.

The prophetesses at Dodona told Herodotus that two black doves flew from Thebes in Egypt; one went to Libya, where it caused the oracle of Jupiter Ammon to be founded; the other to Dodona. The latter settled in an oak-tree and spoke with a human voice "saying that it was necessary that a prophetic seat of Zeus should be established in that place." Herodotus would not believe this crude legend; he explains that the doves were women of Egypt, sold by Phœnicians into Libya and Epirus. They were called birds by the natives, because they could not speak the language; but when they had learned the speech of their captivity they were said to have spoken with human tongues. "So long as she spoke a barbarian tongue, she seemed

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to them to be uttering voice like a bird: for if it had been really a dove, how could it speak with a human voice?" Apparently Herodotus was ignorant of the fact that parrots and ravens reproduce the articulate sounds of men. We may be sure that his informants were wrong in attributing the origin of Dodona, its oak and doves, to Egypt, for there are too many analogies for just such things in Asia and northern Europe.

Since Dodona was an ancient oracle of the inhabitants of Epirus and Thessaly before the Greeks, we may consider its legends Pelasgian rather than Greek. The northern nations who from time to time sent offerings wrapped in wheaten straw to the fane of Apollo on Delos caused their envoys to cross the Adriatic and deliver up the gifts at Dodona. Thence they were sent to the Maliac Gulf and passed from city to city on to Delos. The stop at Dodona shows a connection between the north of Europe and the Pelasgians. Oracles were

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given at Dodona not only from the sound in the oak-tree but the voices of doves. -

There can be little doubt that the grove at Dodona was a primeval spot sacred to divinities much ruder than Zeus and Aphrodité his daughter. In the time of Herodotus it was the fashion to trace everything to Egypt ; we must look the other way for traces of similar worship among the peoples of middle and northern Europe, among the Hyperboreans, as the Greeks called them. And so, if we take the old Italian name of Aphrodité, Venus male and Venus female (for Italy had both) we discover among the Finnic nations on the Baltic a legend in the Kalevala of the old god Vaino, together with his female double Aino, the young girl who spurns him, drowns herself —

“ Like a pretty song-bird perished ”

and becomes a teasing or mournful water-sprite, according to the mood of the poet.

After she has returned to Aphrodité's ele-



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ment Vaino sets out to catch her with his nets and fish lines; she allows herself to be caught in the shape of a fish; but just as he touches the fish with his knife, it springs overboard and mocks him —

I am not a scaly sea-fish,  
Not a trout of northland rivers,  
Not a whiting from the waters,  
Not a salmon of the northseas;  
I, a young and merry maiden,  
Friend and sister of the fishes,  
Youkahainen's youngest sister,  
I, the one that thou dost fish for,  
I am Aino, whom thou lovest.

*(Rune V, Crawford's translation.)*

Venus and Vaino are both of them born of the sea, yet children of the great gods Zeus and Ukko. We may be sure that the people who founded the oracle at Dodona had a male and female parallel to the male and female Venus of Italy and the Vaino-Aino pair on the Baltic. Later on I shall argue that this god must have been Pan, shown by the parallel

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between Pan-Syrinx and Vaino-Aino. Meantime the connection of the dove with Venus may be found in Greek, where a name for the dove is oinás — in all likelihood a word taken up from the old non-Aryan peoples, a word having nothing to do with wine (oinos), but with the bird that at Dodona, and doubtless at many another oak grove, was once identical with a deity.

There is warrant for the ground that many names of gods were assumed by the Greeks proper from the older people of Greece, whom they more or less perfectly subjected. After stating that the Pelasgians had no special names for gods, a statement of course impossible, Herodotus says they first took their god names from Egypt, but afterwards consulted the oracle at Dodona, fearing lest they had done wrong. "So when the Pelasgians asked the oracle at Dodona whether they should adopt the names which had come from the barbarians, the oracle, in reply, bade them

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make use of the names. From this time they sacrificed, using the names of the gods; and from the Pelasgians the Hellenes afterwards received them." It was natural that Herodotus thought all mythological learning came from Egypt, but we must doubt it. The point to be noted is the tradition in Greece handed down by him that god names came from a non-Greek source.

This dove name *oinás* is found not only in Venus but in the favorite son of Venus, Æneas of Troy, not a Trojan but an ally of Priam. Æneas is therefore the dove god humanized and made a heroical, well-nigh a historical figure, just as we shall see that Achilles is the eagle god. But we should beware of thinking of these gods in their relation to such heroes of romance, as if they were the gods wrought out and sublimated to the positions the Greeks gave Zeus and Aphrodité. The stories of mythology branched off long before the gods attained that grandeur

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and continued until all memory of their original connection was lost.

The other Greek word for pigeon or dove, *peleia*, seems to be of Greek, not of Pelasgic origin like *oinás*. We find a probable meaning in the word *pelemizo*, to quake, quiver, tremble. The *peleia* would be the bird that quakes, as one sees the pigeon or wild dove quiver when caught or while dying — a peculiarity that did not escape the sharp eye of Audubon. This is a better derivation than from *pelós*, dark, dusky, ash-colored ; for we have no reason to suppose that the rock pigeon or ringdove would strike the eyes of early men as especially dusky or dark. And so the old King Pelops, whose name adheres to the Peloponnesus, is likelier to mean “Dove face” than “Dark face.”

Venus of the lovely form, sweet voice and enchanted necklace is therefore not merely from the poetic standpoint symbolized by the dove, the bird that draws her flower-studded

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chariot through the air. Venus was the dove itself once upon a time, when people about the Mediterranean were rising from the stage when they could conceive of bloodthirsty warrior-gods only, such as existed on the Baltic down to the Middle Ages, into the conception of gods or goddesses with lovable traits, such as Pallas Athené and Apollo and Aphrodité. The bird that the Greeks called the "quaker" formed naturally the model for the sweet love goddess who fled, trembling, before the spear of Diomedes on the windy plains of Troy. It was owing to his irreverent treatment of Aphrodité that Diomedes lost the love of his wife, and, on his voyage to Italy to found a new colony, the services of his men, whom the vindictive goddess turned into birds. If Æneas, like his mother Venus, seems to descend mythologically from the dove, Diomedes, like his father Tydeus and his patroness Pallas Athené, seems to descend from some bird of prey whose war-

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like nature shows in the name Tydeus, the striker.

What more natural, considering the prevalence of bird worship in remote days, than the offerings of doves in the Temple at Jerusalem and the prominence of the dove at Hierapolis, the vast temple of the Syrian goddess described by Lucian? The latter has left on record that the dove was not eaten at Hierapolis; it was a sacred bird; and he refers to a legend that Semiramis was turned into a dove. So we find the Indians of a clan that bears the name of a bird or beast refusing to kill that bird or beast except on certain occasions, when its sacrifice becomes a religious rite and the harm done it is neutralized by the ceremony and appropriate prayers.

Venus retains in her later shape some bird-characteristics, such as her capture in the golden net made by her husband, who for contrast is a sooty and lame god of the forge. The swan and the sparrow have been assigned to her as

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chariot steeds by poets of antiquity ; but the dove is evidently the true bird of Venus ; other birds are the swallow, because of its intimate connection with spring and flowers, and the iynx, a magical bird used for one ingredient of love-philtres and potions. And in her son Æneas certain bird-traits occur, such as his bearing his father Anchises on his back, which resembles the carrying off by the phœnix of his parent bird. The connection in the early history of Latium between Æneas and the old King Latinus, son of Faunus, must belong to the most remote period, antedating the legends about Troy ; because Æneas the dove hero and Venus the dove goddess must have been Italian as well as Pelasgian Greek.

We are not left without a description, such as it is, of the dove god or goddess belonging to the "Pelasgian" or non-Aryan and probably non-Semitic peoples of Syria. In Lucian's time the priests of the Syrian goddess at Hierapolis preserved a golden image "com-

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pounded of various forms" which was taken with great solemnity twice a year to the seashore, probably to be given a ritual bath; at any rate it accompanied the priests, who went to fetch sea water twice a year. Its barbarous form, which Lucian seems to hesitate to describe, is noteworthy enough; but what is more interesting yet is the fact that it bore on its head the figure of a pigeon. Composite gods with birds on their heads were dug up in the last century in Mecklenburg on the Baltic near the traditional site of a pagan temple. But the bird was not the dove.

We are safe in concluding that Dodona was one of many sacred groves seized on by the Greeks when they conquered Greece and made over into their own, before Zeus was evolved and had taken the place of the old god similar to Vaino of the Finns — before Aphrodité the seaborne had dispossessed a goddess similar to the Finnic Aino and the nymph Syrinx. Vaino himself is like Venus in his double character of



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minstrel who sings the joys of the marriage festival and the lamentations for the dead; Plutarch says that Venus presided over birth and death. Hence the use of doves in two such opposite scenes as marriage and funeral feasts. The Longobards placed over the graves of their people wooden slabs with doves carved on top. In England the pigeon was a death-bird and portent of the grave; the sick man who had a desire to eat of a pigeon was supposed to foretell his own demise. Yet the pigeon also brings good luck. In Russia it was once sacred to Perun the god of thunder, and had some occult power to extinguish fires; but if one should fly in at a window the portent was just the other way; a fire might be expected. Living pigeons used to be placed on the head of a dying man in order to attract the pain.

Pan of Greece, the male Venus of Italy and Vaino of the Finnic tribes have a representative among the German nations who was still fresh enough in the memory of the people

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during the Middle Ages to have found his way into the German poets of the thirteenth century. This is the nature god Wunsch, often mentioned by Hartmann in a way to prove that he was conceived as a deity like Vaino, who created and invented things, especially grain, plants and flowers, beauty in women and children, power and magical strength in men. He often appears where we might translate his name by Nature or Providence or God, but more specifically he is a god of love and happiness who gives to men what they desire, a god of fortune, as the female Venus and Aphrodité were. In throwing dice the Venus cast was the lucky cast. To say that a woman had the figure or feet of Wunsch was exactly as if one said of Venus. Yet Wunsch is always spoken of as masculine.

It is sad to think that the boy learning to shoot, the feather hunter and the pot hunter are fast rendering our woods, fields and gardens tuneless and given over to insects destructive

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of vegetables, fruits and flowers. The Labrador duck, of which large flocks were to be seen in winter on Long Island Sound twenty years ago, is an extinct bird, although protected for most of the year by its habitat on the open waters. We shall soon come to catching the remnants of our commonest songbirds to place them in aviaries, before they too go the way of the Great Auk and the Labrador duck. And we know how truly Chaucer wrote in the "Tale of the Crow" as to the bird that is caged:

Take any bird and put it in a cage,  
And do all thine intent and thy couráge  
To foster it tenderly with meat and drink  
Of all the dainties that thou canst bethink,  
And keep it all so cleanly as thou may —  
Although his cage of gold be ne'er so gay,  
Yet had this bird by twenty-thousand-fold  
Gone eat (of) worms and such (like) wretchedness,  
Forever this bird will done his business  
To escape out of his cagé, if he may.

We are indeed sinking fast into the condition of Italy, where myriads of birds, neither large

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enough nor toothsome enough to serve as food, are slaughtered wherever and whenever they venture to rest on their migrations between Africa and northern Europe. The men who have rooted the beautiful white egret out of Florida are pursuing it into Venezuela and Brazil. If some stop is not put to them, they will in a few years destroy this bird from the face of the earth, as they have banished it from the United States.





## CHAPTER II

### *Picus the Woodpecker*

NOT many miles from Berlin, I was lying in a grove with my back propped against an oak, when I heard a laugh, a quick, cackling laugh overhead. I knew at once it was a woodpecker. I could hear through the back of my head how his claws rattled against the bark as he made his way up the trunk and

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along the larger branches ; my mind's eye was aware how his amazing little serpent of a tongue was darting through dark, involved burrows deep in the wood to ferret out grubs and beetles. Presently he came in sight on an overhanging limb. He scuttled along below the branch like a fly on a ceiling. Brave in his blood-red hood and mottled back, he turned his bright red eye sharply this way and that. Suddenly he laughed again; an echo seemed to return it. Then he paused. Had he caught sight of me and recognized man, the universal policeman, tyrant, murderer? At any rate he moved on. In short rapid ups and downs of flight he made for a dead tree across the glade and slipped round the trunk to peep at me from the other side.

I have heard Germans say that the woodpecker bores into a branch and then scuttles round on the opposite side to see if the hole has gone quite through ! Lucky little one, to find a dead tree at all, considering the fanaticism

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of the native forester, the fury with which he hacks down any tree that looks decayed, and thus deprives Mr. and Mrs. Woodpecker of a spot in which to feed, to chisel a cave for their nest, to make famous music!

As I watched him and he watched me, a reminiscence of the puzzle and maze of old Italian myths connected itself with this bright little chap in my mind.

The bird of Mars, why? Naturally, because of his blood-red hood and eye like the



planet Mars. Also was he the bird that played the part of raven to the infant Romulus, that son of Mavors, when the mother wolf could no longer supply milk to him and his brother. And then I recalled that obscure old god Picus, son of Saturn, father of Faunus, grandfather of Latinus. To be sure! Here he was, or at least the symbol, totem, animal

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representative of him. But why, oh, why did the ancient Italiots choose just this bird, and place him in a line of ancestry that vied with and perchance claimed precedence of Jove?

After all, I reasoned, what do we really know about Greek and Latin mythology, despite the centuries during which we have been pretending to study the classics and nothing but the classics, seeing it, as we still do see it, through the spectacles of ancient writers who lacked the wide sweep of the world's literatures and the world's humbler races to obtain materials extensive enough from which to make comparisons that throw light? Although the men of religion in their day were not so hot to throttle knowledge as they have been since, perhaps because they were not so deadly sure that they knew it all, and that theirs was the only way to save mankind, nevertheless, the heathen too were influenced by fear of offending the pious. Some have broken their confidences regarding



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myths short off at the most interesting point, with the express statement that they are forbid or do not wish to tell more. Herodotus the peerless is one of the most exasperating, because he tells so much concerning the world of his day and its beliefs that one can scarce reconcile one's self to the fact that he refrained purposely from telling more. Pausanias is another. The Eleusinian, the Orphic mysteries — why not have thrown a few rays into them? Doubtless they were simple enough: doubtless it was the very homely simplicity of the ideas they divulged which made them uncommunicable, lest the priestly fabrics overhead should by that simplicity appear feeble and vain.

So here was the prophetic<sup>1</sup> bird beneath whose graven image the Sabines asked for answers from the gods! There he clung at end of a dead branch, as if carved against a wooden column, like the pillar Ovid mentions with a picus atop, or like the soapstone birds

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that Bent found in the ruins of Mashonaland, even as at Matiena in Italy the enemies and allies of the Romans figured him. And then for the first time I perceived why he had been selected to represent the god of thunder-clouds, before the Latins knew of Zeus and other Greekish gods. In some way that I could not make out he was using the branch as a drum and rolling out a peal that must have been heard a mile.

Since then I have learned from better, more patient observers how the woodpecker accomplishes his martial music. By quick, vigorous blows of his beak the dead branch is set in vibration ; then he lays his hollow beak against the vibrating wood to add resonance to the peal. A true performer on the xylophone, he varies his drumming by springing from one branch to another and thus gets a change of note. The rolling naturally suggested thunder, the more so because the ancients thought he drummed before the rain, as indeed

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may be the case, because the coming rain may lure insects out and abundance of food may make the bird livelier in his efforts to please himself and his mate. Whence, to regard him as a capital bird of prophecy and place him at a remote epoch as the visible sign of a god of thunder, was but a step. The epoch, we must suppose, was prior to that in which the aristocracy of gods on Olympus had turned itself into the exclusive set it afterwards became.

According to the sounding of this nature's drum, the auspex, Druid, Velleda, rainmaker of the past argued what was to be the turn of the weather and what were the chances of chase and war. Till well down to present times the magicians of the Lapps, far to the north, and in earlier days those of the Finns and Esthonians, used the magic drum or tambourine to foretell pleasure or pain, luck or evil, with a very distinct recognition, I believe, of the analogies between drum, woodpecker and thunder god. In this century the Lapps,

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like the Samoyeds and other tribes of Siberia, not only used the drum for incantations, but foretold coming events by drawing figures on the stretched hide of the drum and then watching the course taken by a ring laid loosely on the hide, as the vibration of the drumming carried it toward one figure or the other. The probability is, that before Jupiter was known in Italy by that name, the worshippers of the great god Picus, living in their wicker huts lives not so very unlike those of Lapps and Finns, used the tambourine for magic and prophecy, just as some of these Hyperboreans used and still use their own small drum.

National vanity has made sad work of the study of the past. Men of science, in whom one ought never find that a blind patriotism has made them pervert facts, have insisted on the superiority of their own people's ancestry and made havoc of history. German archæologists have claimed Teutonism wherever they learned or imagined that one nation of

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the past overcame another, or suspected that some special virtue characterized a people. The national claimant has been a scourge. Englishmen have had the most absurd ideas of the size, wisdom, valor and purity of Angles and Saxons, ignoring the parts played by Norman, Briton and yet earlier races. Welshmen, Scots and Irishmen will not listen if you point to traces in their tongue, history and legends of nationalities or races, at present despised, who were in Great Britain and Ireland before the Kelts. They have, it is true, classic models ; they but follow in the footsteps of the Romans, who concocted a past that was full of magnificence, although their history and legends show that they sprang from a mixture of shepherds, robbers and outcasts. Perhaps, after all, yonder woodpecker is wiser than we know, I pondered. His droll gestures and bright eye seem to say that he is aware how human beings have made a thunder-bird of him. That may be the rea-

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son why he bursts every now and then into a cackle; to think what fools these mortals be!

It was not the Italiots alone who used to worship Picus because of his antics, queer voice and rolling drum. The Wotjaks still honor him as a god. A few centuries ago the Esthonians and Finns, who, history says, were Christianized in the 12th and 13th centuries, were seen to be Christians only out of fear, to be still quietly worshipping their old idols. The Esthonians kept their thunder god Pikker or Pikné. Could we resurrect the temple huts filled with idols, which they concealed in lonely woods, we should certainly see wooden images of a bird god, Pikker the woodpecker. He is no other than our mysterious deity of Italy, Picus the father of Faunus. This is only one of many threads that connect the Finnic peoples of Russia and Siberia with the rustic classes, the ancient subject races of Italy, ay, and of Greece, and of men eastward beyond the Ægean, whose faded features may

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be detected below the Aryan and Semitic overfloods.

With these old bird gods we get so far back into the past that the difference no longer seems great between the populations of the various continents. We are tempted to imagine that myths and legends have migrated from one people to another, because like myths, like legends, are found in countries far apart. Even across the Atlantic the magic drum, the worship of beasts and birds, such as the bear, and a similar woodpecker with a scarlet hood; the belief that stones have life and that spirits can inhabit rocks, suggest at first a connection by communication.

Sacrifice of beasts, torture, hanging and burning of men, head-hunting, human sacrifices and occasional cannibalism assimilate the red man to the old peoples of Europe and bring them close to those inflated moderns whose ancestors, regarded curiously, are seen to have indulged in all these pleasing vaga-

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ries of the human soul within historic times. Yet, physically, the red man is certainly far removed from the European ; his legends and myths are practically untouched by those of any other continent. We must get out of the habit of supposing that if a legend or fairy-tale almost exactly like one from Greek or Latin appears in northern or western Europe, it was therefore brought from Greece or Italy. More easily could it have gone the other way, from the barbarian to the more cultivated, curious, book-writing nations on the Mediterranean. But for the most part we may be sure that myths and legends did not move about Europe to any great extent, but were produced by similar strains of mankind independently, to meet the needs of a similar state of culture. And since all nature, the beasts and birds about them were pretty much the same, the gods who partook of similar characteristics sprang naturally from similar observations and were credited with similar lives.



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Take the woodpecker as an instance. When we picture to ourselves the European savage, noble ancestor of our puffed-up race, finding it a matter of deep thought how to keep a roof over his head, loving murder, a bloody tyrant to the weak, cringing before power, subject to periodical famines because of his sloth and ignorance, to disease because of his laziness and filthy habits, we can understand his envy and admiration of a bird which, in addition to various marvellous, superhuman traits, has the practical side so developed that it can chisel for itself in a few hours a neat, dry cave in the bole of a tree—a bird ever brave and gay of heart that seems to find nourishment where no green thing grows, right under its busy beak.

Mr. Woodpecker was thought to know the whereabouts of hidden treasures; wherefore is he a special creation of the high god Ukko of the Finns and has a mysterious affinity to fire, also a rain and thunder god. Writing

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in 1644 Johann Gutsloff gives the prayer of an old Esthonian farmer: "Beloved Picker, we will sacrifice to thee an ox with two horns and four hoofs, and want to beg you as to our ploughing and sowing that our straw shall be red as copper and our grain as yellow as gold. Send elsewhither all black thick clouds over great swamps, high woods and wide wastes! But give to us ploughmen and sowers a fertile season and sweet rain."

In Finnish and Esthonian *pikker* is no longer used to designate the woodpecker, perhaps because when a word is once used for a god it becomes dangerous and is gradually dropped in its ordinary meaning. At present *tikka* holds its place. Or else in the course of time the initial *p* has given place to *t*, as we shall find that the Greeks seem to have received the foreign name of the peacock with that bird and changed the initial from *p* to *t*.

In the Kalevala the god of the woods Tapio is the old bird god represented by, perhaps

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once worshipped under, the woodpecker ; his name contains our word to tap, strike, and the German word tapfer, brave. In that epic our friend the woodpecker is not directly named, perhaps because he was so very sacred ; but the minor wood god Nyyrikki, upon whom Lemminkainen calls in his distress to help him track the magic elk, is, like his father Tapio, evidently a survival of Pikker. We can see that from his red cap and blue mantle and the prayer addressed to him that he shall blaze a path through the woody wilds.

O Nyyrikki, mountain hero,  
Son of Tapio of forests,  
Hero with the scarlet headgear,  
Notches make along the pathway,  
Landmarks upward on the mountain,  
That the hunter may not wander.

*(Rune XIV, Crawford's translation.)*

In German legends the woodpecker appears as a magic bird that knows where the spring-wurzel grows, a flower we have reason to

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identify with some species of the peony, the plant of Pan and the sun, that plant which will open concealed doors of rock and permit the lucky possessor to enter the Venusberg and lift treasure. The way to beguile this bird is to stop up tightly the mouth of the hole where its young are; the bird returns, and, after seeing what is wrong, flies off to



fetch a plant which will dislodge the obstruction. If the treasure-seeker gives a shout at the right moment, the woodpecker drops the spray and flies away. Near Rauen in the Markgrafenstein is a princess who guards a treasure. She can only be released and the treasure lifted by some one who shall come at midnight of a Friday, carrying a white woodpecker. She is the descendant of Frau Venus in the Venusberg, with whom, like Ulysses in the island of Kalypso, the knight Tannhäuser passed days of happiness and remorse.

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We know from Pliny what great store the auspexes of Rome set by the woodpecker "known by his cognomen of Mars" and from mediæval German writers that a woodpecker flying to the right was an omen of good luck. Picus the god was figured as a youth with this bird on his head. Though Pikker or Pikne is still familiar to Finns and Esthonians in fairy stories, where he is known as the son of thunder, he seems to have lost all his birdlike qualities. The object with which he strikes his enemies, it is true, is conceived of as a musical instrument, but neither drum nor tambourine ; it is the ancient instrument of the Scotch and Irish — the bagpipes. In one story found in Esthland the son of thunder saves himself from the power of an evil genius by stealing the thunderclap in the shape of bagpipes from his father Kôu and giving them up as a ransom. When Old Horny has them locked up in hell no rain falls and the earth dries up. In another folk-

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tale it is Pikné who is thunder god and owner of the pipes, and it is the devil himself, plainly at an earlier date some goblin not so malignant as Satan, who steals and makes off with them.

Pikker is a word found again in German Specht, woodpecker. Finnic tribes find it inconvenient to pronounce *s* and *p* together. The word Spickgans, smoked goose, appears in Esthonian as pikk-hani.

The Kelts seem to have applied a word like picus and Pikker to the raven, with a change of initial *p* to *f*; since Irish has fiach (feek) for that wily bird of magic and prophecy. It is a bird with human traits, for although the woodpecker laughs, the raven can be taught to speak. Beside Picus the ancient Italians had pica, the magpie — another wise, uncanny bird. The Greeks called the woodpecker with circumlocutions the tree-chiseller, or else pelekas, the hewer with an axe, as if his ordinary name had become too sacred to pronounce. Aristophanes called him oak-striker;

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when he spoke of the poikilis or "speckled" bird that eats the eggs of the lark he probably referred to the magpie.

The importance of the woodpecker in the eyes of Roman soothsayers can hardly be overestimated. I have a seal, scarab-like in form, wrought in the old Italiot way of rounds connected by grooves, which I obtained at Florence. It belongs to the sort called Etruscan. The seal shows a man seated with a bird before him, which he appears to be teaching a trick. As usual in these rude seals, it is not easy to fix the species of the bird; but it seems a woodpecker to which the provincial seal-cutter has given a somewhat longer tail than nature allows Mr. Picus. That the man is an auspex or soothsayer is reasonably certain from the fact that he wears the conical cap seen on the little statuette with Etruscan inscription in the Vatican Museum, a statuette generally allowed to be that of an Etruscan augur or diviner.

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One may recall here the classic story of Ælius the prætor, chief of a famous family of Rome at the time of Hannibal's entrance into Italy. As he sat on his chair a woodpecker flew down and settled on his head. All was excitement and alarm at the prodigy! The bird was caught and the augurs called in. These declared that its coming meant disaster, but whether to Ælius and his clan or to the republic depended on circumstances. Should the woodpecker be freed unharmed, great prosperity would result to Ælius and his family, but disaster would come to the republic. Should the bird be killed, then the republic would prosper, but the Ælian family would meet with ruin.

In a dilemma of this sort the hero always prefers his fatherland to his family, otherwise the story would not be told. Ælius killed the living symbol of the god Picus and at the battle of Cannæ, which occurred soon after, he lost seventeen members of his clan.



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Doubtless this is the bird of popular superstition in White Russia which is described with eyes of fire and a fiery beard, a guardian of treasures, and probably not the demon representing the underground gods of wealth, Pluto or Kuveras, which Gubernatis suggests. In one of the stories of the *Pentameron* a fairy in bird-form stops the king who is about to kill Pontielli. In order that Pontielli and her child shall not die of starvation, the bird picks a hole in the tower where she is confined and gives them food. Here we have the magic woodpecker again.

Ravens and crows were greater favorites with the augurs, since their wide flight and distinct voices made them convenient for divination. That was a strange tale of Valerius Corvus, who accepted the challenge of a huge Gaul to single combat during the invasion of Lower Italy by the Kelts under Bran the "raven" or Brennus. During the duel he was aided by a crow that attacked the Gaul's face with beak

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and wing and so confused him that Valerius made his foe an easy prey, whence Valerius was also Corvus thereafter. Here was a crow-counsellor, like the ravens Hugin and Mugin that whispered advice in the ears of the Norse god Odin. Note that the famous Gaulish conqueror of Rome had a name meaning a bird.

A closer analogy is found in Wales to the legend of Valerius Corvus: in a Mabinogi the hero Owein son of Urien is accompanied by an army of ravens, which attack his enemies like so many Stymphalian birds. Woden's ravens have their parallel in Ireland. The hero Cuchullaind had two magic ravens that announced to him the coming of his foes and were attacked by them for that reason. In Japan there is a special kind of demon or goblin called Karku-Tengu "crow-demon," having wings and the beak of a crow in place of nose. I have an egg-shaped talisman, used as a button, carved of hard wood, which shows delightfully the birth of a Karku-Tengu. The

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little fellow has just chipped the shell; his beak, wing and three-fingered hands are visible where the egg-shell has been broken by his efforts.

It is not strange that birds fascinated the ancient peoples; they fascinate modern men who think they know everything and for the most part are too absorbed by the struggle for life in cities to look



long and closely at nature. In Rhode Island I have watched on Conanicut cliffs a row of sea-birds perching in a recess of the rock near Horse's Head. About sundown, one after the other, these birds would fly far out over the swirling sea to the big black Kettle Rock opposite Castle Hill, turn and return to its perch. When the last had performed this solemn rite, all went to sleep; it was a farewell to the sun. And indeed, when one thinks of the tailor-birds that weave, and the

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rails that hold dancing-parties, and those birds that build bowers to sport in and deck them with shining objects; when one thinks of the preternatural cunning of the magpie, and recollects how prone birds are, even dull domestic fowl, to make sudden, inexplicable calls and rushes; when one notes the clock-like regularity of the return of migratory birds to their old haunts and their supernatural gift of finding a way by night and fog—it is no wonder that not only poets, but tiresome, humdrum persons believed in their magical power at the earliest epochs.

What schoolboy has not marvelled at that strange story of Philomela and Procné, daughters of Pandion king of Athens? According to the legend Pandion's son-in-law Tereus was changed to a hoopoe or a hawk, Philomela to a nightingale, Procné to a swallow. The wicked king of Thessaly who wooed and won Philomela bears in his name (Tereus the piercer, borer) the most notable trait of our little friend

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woodpecker. Pandion "Pan the god" was, as presently we shall see, alternately the eagle, peacock or cuckoo.

Tereus Woodpecker first marries Philomela Nightingale, and then, tiring of her, persuades Pandion (his father-in-law) and Procne Swallow (his sister-in-law) that Philomela is dead; whereupon he gets also Swallow to wife. On the journey home Woodpecker cuts out Swallow's tongue so that she may never tell of his crime when she discovers that her sister is still alive. Whence it followed that the swallow from that time forth could only make twittering noises like barbarians—the Greeks said that barbarians did not speak, they twittered.

When we consider Lemminkainen and Ilmarinen in the poetry of Finland we find this story again, with the cuckoo, not the woodpecker, as the villain of the play.

The wondersmith Ilmarinen, whose first wife was slain through the malice of Kullervo, goes again to Pohjola to woo her sister. But the

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sister fears the same fate and refuses him; whereupon he seizes her and, placing her in his magic sleigh, carries her off. As she gives him none but bitter words and constantly wails and complains, he loses patience and turns her into a gull; whence it is that the gull frequents lonely seas and shores and never ceases to complain. Finally we must not forget a parallel of Picus of Italy and Pikker of Esthonia among the Old Prussians, a Slavic race probably mixed with Finnic tribes. They had an idol to which human beings were sacrificed. When pleased, this idol was heard to laugh! Its name was Picollus! "der olle Pikker"?

But before turning to other bird gods I may say that the expression the Greeks used for a foreign tongue "twitter" has always seemed to me to point to a Slavonic language as the first which suggested the idea. If one listens to Polish or Vendish, without understanding it, there is a peculiarly soft twittering quality to be remarked in the utterance, probably due to

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the comparative infrequency of broad vowels, the softening of consonants and vowels with *i*, and the constant use of the soft *sh*. Geographically, too, the idea that to Greeks a Slav tongue was the nearest and commonest of barbarian languages has everything to recommend it.

Notwithstanding the horror with which the crime of Tereus was regarded by antiquity he was worshipped after death, another proof that we have in him a god whose story is myth become history. Pausanias mentions his tomb in his description of Attika. According to the Megarians he was a king of the district of Pagai in their land. It will be remembered that to punish him his wife slew their son Itys and served him at a banquet; but Tereus was not able to avenge the crime on the vengeful woman he had wronged. He died in Megara by his own hand, reports Pausanias, and as soon as he was dead they built a cairn over his grave and worshipped him

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every year. But instead of scattering grains of barley, they scattered little pebbles on his tomb.

Such wonderful tales were invented by the Greeks to explain the remnants of a worship of the woodpecker found among the earlier denizens of Greece.







### **The Cuckoo Gods**

## **CHAPTER III**

**T**HOUGH I had often heard the cry of the cuckoo on a visit to Europe as a child, the first cuckoo I ever saw was in the west of Ireland long after. A brownish bird the size of a pigeon, looking somewhat like a hawk, flew across the road, and, settling in a field, hopped or rather scrambled about in a rather hawk-like way. I did not recognize him ; but when my driver told me who he was I descended with alacrity and was amused at the clumsiness on foot of a bird that seemed ready enough on the wing.

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“The awkward gawk!” I murmured, remembering the common term for him; and as I beheld his labored gait and bethought me of certain old heroes of Ireland, whose curious traits and adventures have never been explained, I fell to thinking—

Of elders of olde time and their awke dedys.

At last I had clapped eyes on a bird whose peculiar ways and life had given me a clew to legends woven about various mighty men of yore, though his familiar name of gawk among the English, Gauch among the Germans, is considered more suggestive of clownishness and stupidity than of heroism. For he is the unlucky, left-handed, *gauche* bird, whose name has enriched the French language with terms for the left hand and lack of dexterity. The good and bad in him seems to have impressed men and been carried by the old peoples to extremes.

Since then I have often heard and sometimes

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seen the cuckoo in his favorite haunts — some country neighborhood where trees and shrubs are abundant enough to give him rests in his short flights and supply the smaller songsters with convenient nesting-places, which the cuckoo-mother can use in her way. One hears them to the right and left as one punts about the canals of the upper Spree in that odd little country of the Vends, where the old Vendish tongue still lingers among the rustics. What a softness, what a dreaminess, yet what alertness, in their call! Very different is the sound of the American cuckoo — a smaller bird with a louder, hastier, longer note, and a family life that does not lend itself to the grievous charges made against its European cousin.

Difficult to distinguish whence it comes, the call of the old-world cuckoo baffles the listener like the voice of a ventriloquist, as indeed it is. There's your uncanny bird, if ever there was one! And the country people, not content with charging against it the actual tricks and

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misdeeds it plays on other birds in its determination to escape the hardest part of the rearing of its young, have saddled the cuckoo with all sorts of gratuitous crimes. It is said to live in lawless love, like the cowbird of America. It is accused of killing the young in the nest of the little bird where it has placed its own egg to be hatched. It is charged with deserting its own offspring forever, out of pure laziness and hardness of heart, nay, even of devouring its foster-parents !

But some careful observers have maintained that cuckoos pair for life and are steadfast mates, do not directly kill the young of the foster-birds nor break their eggs ; yet they acknowledge that the female cuckoo removes the eggs of the foster-mother after its own child is hatched. The mother keeps her eye on each nest where one of her eggs has been placed, watches over the growth of her offspring, and, when the latter is ready to fly, takes possession of it, and presumably begins

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at once to point out to it the advantage of being a parasite, teaching it how to profit by the kindness of similar hosts thereafter.

Such refinements of observation can scarcely be expected from the ancients, nor in the present from rustics. To the ancients the cuckoo was a darling of crime whose knavery endeared him to them, whose supposed wickedness struck them with the horrified admiration that peasants often show for brazen criminals. Was not the ancient chief or Druid or rainmaker or medicine-man a person who lived on his wits through the credulity of his less clever fellows? How could he fail to admire a bird that showed its "smartness" by shoving on the shoulders of others the trouble of child-rearing? Fosterage of children, a custom found particularly rife in Ireland, may well have had its vogue through imitation of this bird.

The ancients believed that cuckoos took no further care of their young put out to nurse. Thanks to ceaseless vigils on the part of men

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like Baldamus, we know that this is not the case. Believing as they did, they proceeded to argue thus : the young cuckoo must grow up ignorant of father, mother, brother and sister ; when it comes to mate, what is to prevent it from pairing with a near relative ? A tragedy is always possible. Here is the clew to many



a fairy story which has come down from some legend of a heathen god, whose living symbol was the cuckoo, to more than one great drama, and to numberless strange tales,

revolting to modern decency, otherwise inexplicable in their seemingly gratuitous immorality — tales that were repeated in the inglenook as of historical personages, tales —

Of elders of olde time and their awke dedys.

I am not aware that this provenance of many folk-tales, epical songs, ballads, legends

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and myths has ever been pointed out before ; bird gods seem to have attracted little attention ; but the truth of that provenance can, I believe, be substantiated from the mythology and legends of Greece and Rome in the light of those of Ireland and Scotland, Wales, Norway, Finland, Prussia, Esthonia and Russia, — countries where the old traits have received less rubbing, the old tints a thinner varnish of late colors, than is the case with countries like France and Germany, Holland and Belgium.

The Kalevala of the Finns, fitted together into an epic by Elias Lönnrot, the epic that gave Longfellow his impulse for “Hiawatha,” is crammed with remnants of old bird-lore — divine bird-lore, once common to Europe and Asia. With their connections by language to Esths, Lapps, Samoyeds, Turks, Hungarians, Etruscans and the ancient peoples of the Euphrates, the Finns seem the most poetical survivors of a race that once covered the face of Europe, before the Kelts grew numerous

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enough to root them out in this quarter and absorb them in that. Their Kalevala and the ballads and fairy stories which failed to be woven into that epic, are not only admirable as poetry, but are mines from which we can draw in order to repair the gaps in the myths and folk-lore of more than one famous race — Greek, Latin, Keltic, Scandinavian.

The Rigveda of the old Indians speaks of the cuckoo in such a way that we see at once it must have been a god to earlier inhabitants. The kokila, as he is called in Sanskrit, is there said to be a bird who knows all things, not only what has happened, but what shall happen. To the inhabitants of India, as well as to Europeans, is he a prophetic bird. The same is true of two species of cuckoos in New Guinea. In Germany he foretold riches or poverty for the rest of the year, also the number of years the listener had to live, also the time that must elapse before marriage. Goethe has used these ideas in his verses



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“Frühlings-Orakel.” Hesiod taught the Greek farmer to look out for three days of rain when he first heard the cuckoo’s note. On the other hand it has been observed that the Indians of California and Mexico show great terror when they hear the voice of the cuckoo. This is all the more surprising because the American cuckoo rarely if ever interferes with the nests of other birds ; therefore their fear must have some other cause.

In England of the thirteenth century the cuckoo’s treachery to his foster-parents must have been an article of faith, or Chaucer in his *Parlement of Foules* would not have caused the merlin to exclaim in answer to the cuckoo :

Thou murderer of the hedge-sparr’w on the branch  
That brought thee forth! thou ruthful-less glutton,  
Live thou alone, worme (of) corruption!

The *Kalevipoeg*, too, the epic of the Esthonian, is full of bird-mention. But let us keep for the present to the cuckoo gods.

Lemminkainen (from *lemmin*, love) is a

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male god of love, like the male Venus of Italy, and has his female counterpart in Lemmetär. It is from this word that old English got "leman" female lover. A closer parallel still to the male and female Venuses of Italy are Vaino and Aino in the Kalevala, brother and sister demigods, and the old Italiot deities of agriculture called Pales, also brother and sister. Venus and Vaino are indeed the same word. In his form of Ilmarinen, air god, Vaino has the attributes of Vulcan, and just as Vulcan is unable to please Venus, so Vaino is not fortunate with Aino.

No stated bird is given to Lemminkainen in the Kalevala; but his nickname Kauko and the general looseness of his morals point to the cuckoo. Nor is it expressly said that Vaino the old singer, half bard, half demiurge, who is the chief actor of divine and human parts in that epic, has a particular bird assigned him. Rather are all birds obedient to him and he understands through his magic

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the language of all, like unto Solomon. When he plays the harp all birds gather and the beasts, too, and even the fishes swim to the shore to listen to his minstrelsy, even as they came to hear Saint Francis preach. He and Orpheus are the same, bird gods both, as we shall see. If any, it is the eagle that favors old Vaino, that lover ever luckless — who is in that respect in sharp contrast to Lemminkäinen, whom too many women adore — and next to the eagle, the cuckoo.

And good reason is assigned for the love that eagles and cuckoos give to Vaino, for when he cleared the primeval forests of Vainola he left a tree for the birds to perch on (mark this, ye all-too-zealous foresters!):

Down from heaven came the eagle,  
Through the air he came a-flying,  
That he might this thing consider,  
And he spoke the words that follow:  
“ Wherefore, ancient Wainamoinen,  
Hast thou left the slender birch-tree,  
Left the birch-tree only standing ? ”

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Wainamoinen thus made answer :

“Therefore is the birch left standing

That the birds may rest within it,

That the eagle there may rest him,

There may sing the sacred cuckoo.”

Spoke the eagle, thus replying :

“Good indeed thy hero judgment

That the birch-tree thou hast left us,

Left the sacred birch-tree standing

As a resting place for eagles

And for birds of every feather.”

*(Rune II, Crawford's translation.)*

The cuckoo also asks Vaino why he has left the birch-tree and gets the same answer. Wherefore, out of gratitude, the eagle brings fire from heaven, wherewith the forests can be overcome.

Lemminkainen's bird especial, the harbinger of spring—sui-linda or summer bird, as the Esthonians call it—the cuckoo is even more pronouncedly a sacred, auspicious creature than the woodpecker. In some parts of Germany the people still believe that when you hear his call for the first time in spring

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you can learn the number of years you have to live. All you do is to count the calls. Good luck or the reverse is prophesied by the direction from which the sounds come — if from the right, good; if from the left, bad luck.

In Sweden and Denmark they have formulas for listening to the cuckoo, which fix good or bad luck to the points of the compass. The words that rhyme with north, south, east, west, being easily kept in memory, the Swedish peasant has his rule always ready; thus (gök being our ominous bird the gawk):

|                    |              |                    |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| North : norr-gök,  | sorg-gök !   | (sorrow-bird)      |
| South : sør-gök,   | smör-gök !   | (butter-bird)      |
| East : öster-gök,  | tröste-gök ! | (consolation-bird) |
| West : vester-gök, | bästa-gök !  | (best of birds)    |

Flat sweet cakes were baked in spring, shaped rudely like the cuckoo and eaten in dim remembrance of some heathen ceremonial. In Old England a special ale was brewed, called cuckoo-ale, and drunk out of doors.

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Apparently Finns and Esths were in the habit of decking out the tall yokes about their horses' necks, as well as their sledges, with copper or brass cuckoos when they wished to be particularly fine, as when they went a-wooing or drove to a wedding. When Ilmarinen, son of the air and wondersmith, starts for Pohjola to secure the fair maid of the North for his bride, knowing that sly old Vaino is bound on the same errand, he does everything to make himself acceptable to the girl and her covetous mother by indicating his own wealth. Thus he orders his best sleigh with all its decorations —

Take the fleetest of my racers,  
Put the gray steed in the harness,  
Hitch him to my sledge of magic;  
Place six cuckoos on the break-board,  
Seven bluebirds on the crossbow,  
Thus to charm the northland maidens,  
Thus to make them look and listen  
As the cuckoos call and echo.

*(Rune XVIII, Crawford's translation.)*

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Here the crossbow means the bow above the yoke and "bluebirds" are not the sweet spring warblers known by that name in America, but another designation for the cuckoo. The repetition six and seven does not indicate different objects, as one might readily suppose; it is a peculiarity of Finnish poetry to repeat the same thing in successive verses with a larger numeral in each verse. "Golden" is the usual adjective for the cuckoo, but "blue" is often added, the one adjective being poetic exaggeration for the bluish-brown back, the other for the gray sides of the cuckoo. As the sleigh he orders out is his "sledge of magic" and as he was the Vulcan of the Finnic tribes, we must suppose that these six or seven birds were automata of metal that imitated the cuckoo's voice like our clocks and sang when the sleigh moved—a superior sort of sleighbells.

The cuckoo was a marriage bird and yet a sinister bird of crime; he was addressed as

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“golden” and “beauty” also with other terms of admiration; but he seems to have been also feared. Perhaps because he is so “awke” on the ground, his name is often the synonym for lubberliness and stupidity. Zeus took the form of a cuckoo to approach Hera, at once his sister and his wife, and a bass-relief shows the cuckoo on the sceptres he and she carry in a marriage procession. Why the cuckoo myth can be detected even among the haughtiest gods of Olympus will be seen when we come to speak of Pan.

The birds carved in soapstone found by Bent in the ruins of Zmbabwe, Mashonaland, which were left there by some as yet undetermined race of intruders and gold miners, may prove to be rude attempts to portray the cuckoo, rather than the woodpecker.

When we recall the superstitions as to birds that still live in Europe — as, for example, that a bird flying into a house is unlucky, a stork deserting a homestead portends death, a



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hen crowing at a wedding augurs that the wife will wear the breeches, swallows building on a house bring good luck, gulls inland bode a storm—we begin to realize what a body of religious belief must have once existed in Europe with respect to birds alone, since these are merely fragments, survivals down to historical times, remnants of a vast bird lore, bird religion. Consider that in order to have birds to augur from, as they picked up the sacred food, or as they were slaughtered and inspected, the Romans took the trouble to carry pullets about with them in war (*auguria pullaria*) and assigned them a special place in their entrenched camps. The *auspex* (*avis*-*pex*, bird seer) presided at the founding of Rome, Latins and Sabines having found that birds were interpreters of the future long before Rome was. The Etruscans, whose mastery in religion the Romans acknowledged, were adepts in reading the signs of the bird and annually furnished Rome with bird-readers.

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The amount of this bird worship was so great and its existence so universal that it seems illogical to suppose the transfer of a bird myth from Greece to Italy, or from Italy to Finland or Ireland, because we find the same framework of the myth in those several lands. Why could not the same story have grown in each? It is more logical to deduce from such resemblances a similarity of race and cultivation in prehistoric times, especially if other proofs exist that in remote epochs there was far less diversity among the populations of Europe than in later days.

The Finns, now for the most part Russian subjects, live on the Baltic north and east of the gulf of Finland; while their cousins the Esthonians, also Russian, dwell to the south of the gulf. The Lapps to the northward have always seemed to supply the Finns with an ideal of what magicians, wind-wise sooth-sayers and conjurers should be; but, for the Esths, the Finns were quite good enough in

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that line. In the Kalevala of the Finns the demi-gods Vaino, Ilmarinen and Lemminkainen go northward, as if to Lapland, to beat the toothless hag of Pohjola at magic, win her daughters for wives, or rob them, if necessary, and especially to carry off the sampo—that fruit, flock and riches-giving talisman, now conceived of realistically as a mill, again thought of as a constellation, or the rainbow, or the sun's face itself. In the Kalevipoeg, an epic of Esthland drawn together like the Kalevala from ballads scattered and conflicting at times, the sorcerer of most note is a Finn, and the demi-god of the Esths swims northward from Esthonia to avenge on him the loss of a mother. As Vaino and Lemminkainen defeat by magic the Hag of the North, so Kalevipoeg the giant rudely pulverizes the magician of Finland, who, as we shall see, stands to him in a relation peculiar to cuckoo gods.

Bird lore is even more frequently mentioned in the Esthonian than the Finnish epic. The

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first canto of Kalevipoeg opens with the invocation —

Steer, O bard of honied accents,  
Steer the shallop of your ballads,  
Of your song the slender shallop,  
Turn it deftly to the seacoast,  
Where the eagle, golden proverbs —  
Where the raven, silver stories —  
Swans, their hero-lays of copper  
Have from ancient days kept hidden,  
That were formerly outspoken.  
Cry it forth, ye birds of wisdom,  
Utter it, ye ocean billows,  
And, ye winds, the secret publish —  
Where may lie the Kalev's cradle,  
Where the homestead of the heroes !

The birds here mentioned are valued in descending scale by the adjectives golden, silver, copper ; which reminds one of the South American legend of the origin of chiefs, nobles and people from three celestial eggs, of gold, silver and copper respectively. The eagle and raven are favorites of mythology ; the swan is of that Siberian variety which makes rich

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melody and does literally sing its death-song when it is caught by the ice of a freezing night and cannot loose itself from the spot to which it has been frozen.

Kalev the father of Kalevipoeg, whose name is also found in Kalevala, was of the race of giants or demi-gods. A widow finds a pullet, a starving crow and partridge egg; she brings them home and puts them in her locker. The pullet broods the egg and hatches out a girl, Linda, whose name means bird; the pullet herself turns into another girl Salmé; and the starved crow becomes a domestic drudge. What could be more *redskin* than such a legend? Linda is wooed successively by the sun, the moon, the winds, the water and the son of the richest king of the North — all in vain! She will take none but Kalev. Their son Kalevipoeg “Kalev’s boy” is a bird of a boy, as the expression runs — born, be it noted, after the death of his father — a hero of enormous eating and drinking powers, of colossal

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strength, lazy, but not good-for-nothing, fated to misfortune, while yet a lawgiver and ruler of his people.

Throughout his life, at critical moments, birds are ever at hand to warn and pilot him through the dangers that beset him. As Scandinavian Siegfried is led by birds, so is also Kalev's boy ; as Siegfried has a wondersword



forged and kills the forge master, so Kalev's boy, and he kills the smith's son. But the crime that the latter commits with this sword, and the story

of the sword as the avenger on its own master of that crime, are finer touches than anything in Siegfried's tale. Again, the adventure of Siegfried with the martial Brunhild, and that of the prince in the fairy-tale with the sleeping beauty, are echoes of the cuckoo myth based on the heroic cuckoo that rouses the blossom — that enchanted maid of spring — from her long winter sleep. We shall find this idea,

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now happy, now tragic, concealed under the history of other heroes in very distant lands.

The parallel with Siegfried goes much farther, if, as we can do in all these old tales, we put Siegfried's father for himself; since it is the commonest of all traits in mythology to find the same plot under the life history of father and son, or under that of earlier and later folk-hero.

It will be remembered that Sigurd dishonors his own sister; Kalevipoeg also ruins his sister, but does not know her at the time. As soon as she learns who he is, she throws herself into the water, and in later versions he passes on through life unwedded, and, though boisterously jovial, yet a prey to remorse.

The very same story occurs as an episode about a subordinate personage in the Kalevala of the Finns. The brother is an unlucky youth of giant strength named Kullervo, over whose birth the poet seems intentionally obscure, if not contradictory. When the sister

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learns who he is, she laments the mistake and casts herself into the stream.

Scarcely had the maiden spoken  
When she bounded from the snow-sledge,  
Rushed upon the rolling river,  
To the cataract's commotion,  
To the fiery stream and whirlpool.  
Thus Kullervo's lovely sister  
Hastened to her own destruction,  
To her death by fire and water,  
Found her peace in Tuonela,  
In the sacred stream of Mana.

*(Rune XXXV, Crawford's translation.)*

The account of Kullervo's birth is strangely muddled, like those of many other heroes — Kalevipoeg, Cuchullaind of Ireland, Gwalchmei or Gawayne of Britain. His race is obliterated by an envious uncle, Untamo by name; yet later he finds father, mother, brothers and other sisters, beside the one who drowned herself. It is as if he found them again in the underworld; but if so, they scorn him still for his crime. One reads between the lines that he is



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the son of Untamo, his mother being Untamo's niece; he is the child of relatives in a prohibited degree and as such is fated to the same crime. In fact Kullervo, like Sigurd, Kalevipoeg and, as we shall see, Conchobar of Ireland, are variants of the same story, and that story is drawn from the life of the cuckoo, the bird whose young are brought up, not only apart from each other, but, so it was hitherto believed, unknown to their parents.

Singular, how often this cuckoo trait appears in classical mythology! Take the ancestry and descendants of Picus, the Italiot god, the woodpecker, which we have been lately considering. Janus and Saturn, to begin with! Janus married his own sister Camesa; he was the old war god, god of the year, the "janitor" or "opener" of the year, after whom the month of January was named. Saturn, a god of agriculture, supposed to have come to Italy in Janus's age, married his own sister Rhea and devoured his children by her

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— a foible explained by the belief that the mother cuckoo lays her eggs in another bird's nest to hide their offspring from a cannibal father.

Picus son of Saturn is an exception ; he marries a daughter of Janus named Canens, whose name and whose fame for singing indicate a bird. But here mythology distinguishes. The woodpecker cannot have the character of a cuckoo. But when in this genealogy we descend to Faunus the son of Picus, the cuckoo crime returns. He married his own sister Fauna and was a sun and forest god like Pan, bearing indeed a name with the same root as Pan.

The unlucky, awkward character attributed to the cuckoo has left a trace in many languages. We have seen how gowk and gawk come into English from the shorter name for the bird ; to this we may add old English "awke" "awkward" from the same word. The hard *g* must have softened into *y*, as we

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find it in Irish and in dialects of German like that in the Mark of Brandenburg; later still, even the *y* sound has disappeared. We can thus replace with a simple etymology that labored and unconvincing one found in the dictionaries. In French again the word “gauche” left hand, put M. Littré to his trumps. Here is our grayish-brown friend again, the gawk, German Gauch, with the guttural *ch* softened down to French utterance. Hence in the dialect of Craven we have gauk-handed for left-handed. This unlucky, because criminal, bird was identified with that quarter from which cold winds come, or into which the sun plunges and perishes; it was identified with the side turned to the north or the west—which came about in this way.

The early European, who was taught to regard the sunrise as the quarter toward which to face in prayer to higher beings, found the cold-bringing north winds on his left, the flower-bringing south winds on his right.

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And later, if the lucky, favorable ideas at first associated with the south and the right hand caused him to turn with his face to the north, in order to have favorable sunrise on his right hand, still, the left would be unlucky, because there dies the sun, there dwell the dark gods.

The notion that cuckoos do not retire to the south, but hibernate in hollow trees, sprang up from observing several facts and putting wrong constructions on them. Cuckoos do not band together, like swifts, swallows, storks and cranes, just before migrating to warmer lands; they are stealthy birds and after ceasing to call, still lurk about, and then are gradually missed from their haunts without any action to show what they intend. The mystery was solved to the satisfaction of country people by the frequent finding of cuckoos in full feather in the hollows of old trees, especially of willow-trees. What else brought them there, except it were to sleep out the winter, like flies and many insects? It was

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not observed that in all such cases the cuckoo did not get out because it could not. In other words, it was a prisoner owing to the stupidity of its parent.

The mother cuckoo prefers sheltered nests of other birds for her furtive laying, and often cannot get into the nest, or is too sharply watched by the little birds to allow her the time. She then lays her egg on the ground, takes it delicately in her beak,



watches the propitious moment and deposits it in the nest. Often this nest is in the hollow of an old willow and has been chosen by the little birds because of its narrow entrance. This is an additional safeguard against intruders. In her hurry to commit her beguilement Madam Cuckoo does not reason that if the entrance

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is too small for her to enter by, it will be too small for the full-fledged young cuckoo to issue from. The egg is deposited; later on she returns and removes the eggs of her host. Foster-father and foster-mother wear out their wings and beaks in bringing the young cormorant food; it grows bigger and bigger; one fine day it tries to get out of the nest, and finds that the hole is too small!

This frequent tragedy in bird-life accounts for the discovery of dead cuckoos in hollows of trees, for the firm belief still cherished by rustics in parts of Europe that the cuckoo hibernates, and for the further vilification of the poor bird, as slothful, slumbering, torpid—a view naturally reinforced by the observation that the cuckoo seems too lazy to build its own nest and rear its own chicks.

As a matter of fact the European cuckoo lays her eggs at such long intervals apart, from a week to ten days, that she would have great difficulty in rearing a brood. The first chick

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would certainly kill the others, as they successively appeared, merely by its own weight. The mother cuckoo is not to be whitewashed entirely; but she is not the heartless voluptuary she has been supposed. She is actively on the watch over six or seven young ones entrusted to the care of as many nurses, and stands by to take charge of a squab which some foster-parent of uncommonly sharp understanding, or uncommonly sharp temper, has thrown out of the nest, for the devil's bantling it is!

The old English song of spring registers the belief that the cuckoo never bothers itself with labor (swik) —

Wel singes thu cuccu,  
Ne swik thou naver nu,  
Sing cuccu, cuccu —

and Middleton has left on record the contempt of Englishmen for Welshmen, or perhaps Frenchmen, in the phrase "Welsh ambassador" as applied to the cuckoo, either because Welshmen came down in spring from

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the hills of Wales during the months of the cuckoo's appearance to raid or to work in the fields, or because under "Welsh" we are to understand French and foreigners generally, and the cuckoo was observed reaching Great Britain from France. Among the famous fools in Great Britain are cited the "cuckoo-penners" of Somerset, who believed they could prolong the summer by caging cuckoos.

The lazy trait of the cuckoo appears very strongly expressed in the Esthonian hero, Kalev's boy. He is so abnormally lazy that at times he will not even rouse himself when invaders from the north — the steel-clad hosts with icicles for spears — fall upon and devastate Esthland. So with Kullervo. That Finnish oaf and luckless one, his laziness as well as his bird origin, appear in a Finnish fairytale related of a youth of enormous power and ruinous strength. He is not called Kullervo, but Munnapoika, which means the egg's boy, the Son of the Egg.



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In Wales, too, we have the cuckoo traits in the family of King Arthur, who in Mallory's tales was by no means the chaste monarch Tennyson makes him. King Arthur's parentage was unknown. One day a handsome queen arrives from the Orkneys; she is the wife of King Lot. King Arthur succumbs to her charms. Two children are born to them, Gwalchmei, who becomes Gawayne or Gauvain in the later tales, and Modred, who destroys Arthur and his knights. Merlin foretells to Arthur that this shall be his fate and the reason given is the startling one — that the wife of King Lot is no other than Arthur's sister! The cuckoo crime has occurred, because cuckoos cannot recognize their own brothers and sisters.

Whatever "Modred" may mean, we can now explain the name of Gwalchmei. According to Professor J. Rhys, Gwalchmei means the "Hawk of May"; but he seems not to understand why Gawayne should be so termed. Yet for a cuckoo god such a term is thoroughly

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a Welsh, or, for the matter of that, Scandinavian circumlocution for the typical bird of May, the cuckoo. The cuckoo is slightly hawk-like in appearance, especially when on the wing; so that there has always been a widespread idea in Europe that cuckoos turn to hawks in August. Now the cuckoo clew here given makes things clear. It was said of Gwalchmei the Good that his strength increased till midday and decreased till sunset; the idea seems borrowed from the sun; but it may allude to the ceasing of the cuckoo's call in midsummer.

How persistent the cuckoo idea was in Greece and Italy is seen from the forbidden relationship of the gods already mentioned. From Pausanias we learn that, in order to obtain his sister Hera for his wife, Zeus turned himself into a cuckoo and flew near Hera, who caught and played with him. And while Pausanias protests that he does not believe such tales, he describes a statue of Hera in the

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Heraion, not far from Mykenai, and notes that she carries in one hand a sceptre on which perches a cuckoo, in memory of the stratagem of Zeus. Such is the power of religion! Acts reprobated by the Greeks were publicly insisted upon, dwelt upon in their monuments, merely because the remote, barbarous past had marvelled at the strange acts of birds and made them their gods.





## The Couvade in Ireland & Persia.

### CHAPTER IV

**I**T was observed by the explorers of South America that certain Indian tribes had a most singular custom, one which has hitherto failed to be explained. When a child was born to an Indian of note, the father was put to bed and tended with as much care as if he were the mother. This went so far that the mother was neglected, whilst her lord and master assumed all the airs of the real sufferer. Certain Tupi tribes still practise this custom and the startling fact has since been observed that the odd habit once existed among the Basques of Spain. It is less generally

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known that the couvade, or brooding, existed among the ancient inhabitants of Ireland, where I have discovered it through the old legends. Traces of the same thing, as I shall show, exist in Persia also among the stories of the Shah Nameh.

The couvade has been sought to be explained through psychology, as if it were a superstitious belief in the transfer of the mother's identity to that of the father; but for the most part writers have been content to chronicle the extraordinary freak without looking for more obvious reasons close at hand, namely, in the keen observation of the habits of birds on the part of primitive men and in consequence a childlike imitation on their part of the actions of birds.

The cuckoo is one of those birds which deserve the special protection of men; because it not only does no harm to crops, but spends its entire time, unbothered by family cares, in reducing the foes of agriculture and forestry.

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It is a bird that devours vast quantities of hairy caterpillars, which are rejected by most insect-eating creatures. It may be doubted, however, whether this good trait had much to do with the admiration for the cuckoo among early men.

In Ireland, as in Finland and Esthland, there were cuckoo demigods. They are not only of preternatural strength and agility, but subject to periods of apathy, attributed either to fairy blight, or — what tells the story of the meaning of these things the plainest — the “couvade.” In the discovery of the importance of the bird gods in the eyes of early peoples and in the connection of the “couvade” with demigods and heroes, clearly birdlike in their main traits, we have the long-sought clew to the mystery. We may guess that it began with the observation that male birds assisted in the brooding of the eggs. After a stage in which the father was treated like the mother before the birth, it came to the

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stage in which we find it, namely, treatment of the father like the mother after the birth in connection with festivities in honor of the little stranger.

Yet, one may say, the cuckoo does not brood its eggs. Here the kindly traits of most birds became blended with the unnatural conduct of cuckoos, and were applied to the same bird god, whom we find as a hero in the old ballads.

The Irish have regarded Fion and Cuchulaind as historical characters, which is not surprising, when one sees the way in which the old Irish historians provided them with plausible ancestors and dates. But those whom dates would not convince are still loath to give up the actuality of heroes about whom so much that is possible to man has been handed down, and relegate them, as mere abstractions, to the status of survivals from old gods. It is clear, however, that the cycle of stories about Fion and Oisín—the Ossianic heroes, as Macpher-

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son called them—and the cycle of stories about Conchobar and Cuchullaind are at bottom the same; composed at different periods, they naturally show great variations. The Fion cycle is more chivalrous, less crammed with unnecessary bloodshed; while that of Cuchullaind is wilder and more savage. In the Fion cycle, again, the traits of Diarmuid are somewhat like those of Cuchullaind. We have something like the same distinction in the Kalevala between Väinämöinen and Lemminkäinen. Old Vaino, the minstrel, is more the savior and helper of his people; Lemminkäinen, the loose lover, is a headstrong young fighter and magician, like Cuchullaind.

Not only does Cuchullaind bear obvious in his name his origin as a cuckoo god, but his birth, exploits and death are those of a cuckoo. Yet the Irish labored to avoid the plain inference from the sound of his name, and a legend grew up to help them. The boy was originally Setanta by name, said they, and



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Cuchullaind was a nickname obtained after this wise: One night when he followed his "uncle" Conchobar to the house of Culann, a smith, the gates were locked and a ferocious dog lay in watch. The boy killed the hound out of hand, as Herakles overcame Cerberus, and Kalevipoeg, the watchdog of hell; and when the smith lamented his loss, Setanta said "I will be your cu (dog) until another is grown large enough to guard your house," whence Setanta was called Cuchullaind, hound of Culann.

The legend is the result of a forgetting or intentional ignoring of the cuckoo, perhaps owing to its evil repute, and also of the high opinion the Irish had of dogs, which they bred very well and for which they were famous long ago. Cu, hound, was an honor-name for a champion. The name Setanta may be explained through the Finnish, like many names in Ireland for divisions and streams. It is evident from such parallels that, before the

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Kelts, the population was of a stock similar to Esthonian, Finnish, etc. Now Setanta may be explained by Finnish for uncle, seta (genitive -dän) and may have meant "son of his uncle" for reasons about to be explained. But the curious word Cuchullaind is explained by Esthonian Kukkulind "cuckoo bird." Without doubt he is a survival of a bird god of the Finnic tribes in Ireland conquered by the Kelts. The word "lint" for bird remains in the Suffolk dialect of England in lint-white, a local name for the lark.

The accepted description of Cuchullaind's birth shows his bird origin very clearly; no other cuckoo demigod is so plainly a bird. His mother was Dechtiré, who was sister of King Conchobar of Ulster and also his charioteer. One legend says that there were grievous scandals regarding Conchobar and his car-driving sister. But a more veiled account is as follows: One day Dechtiré and her maids disappear and soon after news is brought to

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Conchobar that wonderful birds with gold chains about their necks have been seen in the land. He sets out to hunt them, is led to a palace he has never seen before, where is a beautiful woman with attendant maids, whom he does not recognize. He demands that she shall be his wife, but she says she is about to become a mother; and that same night Setanta or Cuchullaind is born, with features like Conchobar!

Throughout his career this child of doubtful origin shows the cuckoo or bird characteristics, not once or twice, but a dozen times. The dates of his taking arms, his first adventure and his death confirm it, if we put weeks for years in the account we receive. Thus, at seven weeks, the end of May or beginning of June, a young cuckoo is fledge: at seven years young Setanta induced his "uncle" to grant him weapons and harness, or, as the men of the later Middle Ages would say, he was made a knight. At seventeen weeks, the end of July or begin-

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ning of August, the cuckoo has deserted its foster-parents: at seventeen years Setanta or Cuchullaind defended Ulster single-handed against an army. At twenty-seven weeks, or September, the cuckoo disappears into hollow



trees, or is turned to a hawk; at twenty-seven years Cuchullaind was slain by the magic of the sons of Cailletin.

His origin is as mysterious and veiledly criminal as that of Arthur in Wales or of Kullervo in the Kalevala. Like Kalevipoeg, who was born of Linda, the bird, long after his reputed father Kalev's death, and took the heritage from his elder brothers by beating them at hurling the stone, Cuchullaind thrashes and completely drives off fifty boy-princes in the royal school to which he comes at a tender age. These feats are echoes of the young cuckoo's exploits in ridding the nest of such

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foster-brothers as may have escaped the vigilance of Madam Cuckoo and grown up to be rivals for food and the attention of his foster-parents.

In looseness of morals Cuchullaind almost equals Lemminkainen, who, as we have seen, was a god of love. Although he has a serious love affair and a wife, yet, whilst he is betrothed to the woman he afterward marries, he has a second love affair in Scotland. Moreover he was said to have a taboo or prohibition laid on him not to wed; and cuckoos were falsely thought to have no regular mate.

In the stress of single combat Cuchullaind showed his bird traits with singular clearness. He had a very disagreeable way of changing in size, becoming *diasthartha*, as a bird ruffles up its feathers in fighting and appears twice its normal size. He leapt in the heat of combat on to the rim of his opponent's shield. In his fight with the giant Goll he soared up and alighted on the shield of Goll "like any bird

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of the air" says the story. In that with Eocho the Blue-Green, Cuchullaind is thrice blown off Eocho's shield into the sea before he is able to overcome that huge monster. The same cuckoo will, if possible, hold the same district year after year and challenge all comers. The combat that Cuchullaind undertakes for Ulster is the war that a cuckoo makes against rivals who invade the district the bird has seized as its own.

In Cuchullaind's trip to Scotland to learn the military art from Scatach "the Shadowy," an Amazon who kept a military school, we have the annual disappearance of cuckoos, no very good long-distance fliers, across the Irish Sea where it is narrowest. He lands on Cantire, and, proceeding to the school, has a love adventure with Aoifé, the daughter of Scatach, who bears him Conlaech, but after he has returned to Ireland. Like Oidipous, and like the hero Sohrab of Persia, Conlaech has never seen his father; so the son when he comes of

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age goes to Ireland and fights with his father, because it was supposed that neither male nor female cuckoo took any heed of their offspring and therefore the latter must approach its real parents as a total stranger.

Another, more poetic, tale of Cuchullaind represents the cuckoo as the bringer of spring. Along with other heroes he goes to the Isle of Man — an island named after Mananan of the Sea, a god of the under-world of waters, like Mana in the Kalevala — and storms a city in which dwells the beautiful Blathmaid “Blossom.” He loves Blathmaid and she loves him, but King Curoi, a wizard of Kerry, takes her from him as his share in the spoils — as Agamemnon took Briseis away from Achilles — and carries her off to his fortress in the southwest of Ireland, leaving Cuchullaind bound and shorn of his long hair.

The lovers communicate; the sign for Cuchullaind to attack the fortress and carry

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off Blathmaid is given by the latter, who pours milk into the stream that passes the castle. The plot succeeds and Curoi is killed, while Cuchullaind goes off with Blossom as if he had no wife to grieve over his fickleness. In this fine allegory Curoi is winter, Blathmaid the flowers of spring and Cuchullaind the bird whose notes chase winter off and deliver the flowers from their icy bondage. Perhaps the milk in the stream is the ice floating down in sign of the approaching summer.

In his book on the poetry of the Finns the Italian writer Comparetti lays great stress on the low form of wizardry and magic shown by the contests of Väinämöinen with Youkahainen, and the preference of Lemminkainen as well as Väinämöinen for conjuring over battle. But the same traits appear in Cuchullaind. On his voyage to Scotland he uses "sea magic" like a Finnish wizard; in his contest with Eocho Rond, as related in the "Feast of Bricriu" in which, like the Finnish conjurers,



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the prize is the hand of a maiden, Cuchullaind and Eocho Rond use magic by turns in order to ward off each other's weapons.

Cuchullaind is particularly expert with the old weapon to bring down birds—with the sling, David's weapon, the natural arm of the shepherd. When proceeding against Ailill, the fairy king of Connaught, just to give him a taste of his quality, as the Irish say, he killed with a cast from his sling a bird that was sitting on Ailill's shoulder. A very curious weapon called the *gaebolg*, which was cast with the foot along the surface of the water, was the trump card of Cuchullaind when engaged in the memorable struggle at the ford with his old schoolmate and friend. In his fight with the stranger who is his son he also used the *gaebolg*. It is evidently a peculiar contrivance to kill waterfowl similar to fowling spears used by Eskimos and Lapps. The Irish legend particularly states that it came "from the eastern parts of the world," which

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usually means the Baltic, when the actual direction is told. In Trinity College, Dublin, is an Irish treatise on bird auguries which, so far as I know, has not been translated.

Another bird trait, which he shares with Vaino and other heroes of the Finns and Esths, is that of understanding the speech of birds; it is his own language! He is expert in capturing birds. In one story he hits with his sling two magic birds that turn into Liban and Fand, daughters or wives of Mananan of the Sea, who have fallen in love with him, and in consequence drops into a stupor, becomes half crazy and otherwise shows that the hibernating cuckoo is the root of the story.

In fact we must regard Cuchullaind as the cuckoo god pre-eminent, a typical descendant in myth and legend from a deity whose traces are found in nearly every part of the world.

That this is not an extravagant statement appears when we examine the epic of the Persians, the Shah Nameh, in which the old

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bird gods are humanized as thoroughly as they have been in Ireland's legendry. The hero Sahm exposes his son Zal, when first born, on the rocks of the Elburz mountains, where the Simurg, a fabulous, griffin-like bird, finds and fosters him. Sahm sees Zal standing in the Simurg's nest and repents and takes him back, when he, or rather the young cuckoo, is grown. Zal marries Roodabeh and calls the Simurg to her help when she is about to be a mother. When I treat of the eagle the reason for this office of the Simurg will appear.

Kai Kaûs, the Persian king of the same mythical period, makes a campaign against the deevs, or powers of darkness and winter, whose king, the White Giant, overcomes the invaders by magic and reduces them to that



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impotent condition we meet so often in Ireland, where Conchobar or Fion is the victim, or in Finland, where it is Lemminkainen or Youkahainen. Rustem, the son of the Zal who was nurtured by the Simurg, comes to the assistance of his king and his heroes and slays the White Deev, as Cuchullaind rescues Conchobar or Fion. Now the reason why the White Deev temporarily overcomes the Persian king and heroes is the same reason found in Ireland for the lethargy that befalls Conchobar and the heroes of Ulster. It is the woman's helplessness; it is the cou-vade! I suspect the whole Kai dynasty of Persia were bird heroes. Did not Kai Kaûs attach eagles to a car and attempt to reach heaven by their aid?

But much earlier bird-god literature existed on the Euphrates among the Akkads. The "sin of the god Zu" was the stealing of some talisman from the high gods Anu, Bel and Rimmon, perhaps the sun itself, or maybe

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some wonder-working thing like the Kalevalan Sampo ; for the tablets are too broken to perceive clearly what it was. His bird character appears in a fragment concerning a certain god Lugal-turda, who, like Kullervo and other cuckoo heroes, had neither father nor mother :

A turban be placed on his head  
When from the nest of the god Zu he came,

and again in a phrase in the annals of Assurnazir-pal, "like the divine Zu bird upon them darted." The late George Smith very acutely likened the Zu bird to the eagle or the woodpecker as they appear in the folk-lore of Europe. As to Lugal-turda, whom I suspect to have been the cuckoo, he translated :

No mother gave him life,  
No father with him associated,  
No noble knew him ;  
Of the resolution of his heart, the resolution he changed not,  
In his own heart the resolution he kept ;  
Into the likeness of a bird was he transformed,  
Into the likeness of the divine Zu bird was he transformed.

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But to return to the Shah Nameh: other cuckoo and bird traits appear in the life of Rustem, the child of Zal and Roodabeh. He is not exposed or put away to foster, but he has exactly Cuchullaind's adventures. During a raid into Turan, Rustem loves Tehmineh, and in parting tells her to send the son she may bear into Persia to him. Sohrab their son invades Persia — as Conlaech invades Ireland — and after overcoming everybody else, succumbs to his unknown but invincible father.

Thus we have the same story, or fragments of the same story, in Italy — Janus, Saturn, Faunus; in Persia, with Sahm, Zal, Rustem and Sohrab; in Wales, with Arthur and his "nephew" or son Modred; in Ireland, with Conchobar, Cuchullaind and Conlaech; in Scandinavia, with Sigurd and his sister; in Esthland, with the Finnish magician and Kalevipoeg and the island maid; and in Finland, with Untamo, Kullervo and the latter's sister. We shall presently see it in Greece also, but

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in a far completer state than the story of Tereus and Philomela already mentioned in the chapter on the woodpecker.

In Ireland it is not Cuchullaind alone who is a cuckoo god made man ; the cuckoo shows in his ancestry. We have seen how his uncle, who was also his father, has the cuckoo trait. Now that same parent Conchobar robs his own stepfather of his kingdom, as the young cuckoo was thought to devour its foster-father. His wife Meave elopes from him with another chief, as the female cuckoo was supposed to be inconstant ; and their daughter pursues the same course with regard to her husband. To cap the climax, in an aberration of mind, Conchobar marries his own mother Nessa and has a son by her, Cormac Conlingeas by name, a famous warrior in his day !

These ghastly domestic tragedies can now be understood as poetic changes and exaggerations in old legends, based on observation of cuckoos, their actual deeds and attributed

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moral traits. I venture to say that in almost every legend in which we find a father fighting with a son whom he does not recognize one may detect from other traits that it is based on a cuckoo plot, the root of which is the singular habit of the female cuckoo in Europe, Asia and Africa of causing other birds to hatch her eggs. Such are not only the Sohrab-Rustem combats and the Cuchullaind-Conlaech, but the Russian combat of Ilya of Murom with his son Falcon, and the early fragmentary German tale of Hildebrand fighting with his son Hadubrand — nay, the episode in classical mythology of Saturn overcome by his son Jupiter.

Hitherto no satisfactory explanation has been given for the remarkable recurrence of marriages between brother and sister in the mythology and legends of many countries: such as Saturn with Rhea, Zeus with Hera — divine marriages which were undoubtedly taken as precedents for the historical marriages of



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the same sort in royal houses, such as that of Atossa of Persia and the Ptolemies of Egypt. Surely it is worth while to discover that these offensive features resolve themselves into unions that might be possible in a family of eccentric birds!

The evil imagined in the cuckoo has left its trace in the vulgar speech of Germany. *Hol' dich der Kuckuck! Das weiss der Kuckuck! Der Kuckuck hat ihn hergebracht* — “The deuce take you! The Old Boy knows! The devil must have brought him!” — show that like other pagan gods the cuckoo god was degraded to a devil. The hoopoe is called the cuckoo's sexton or lackey, and the wryneck the cuckoo's maiden, perhaps because the ancients fancied that the bird was twisting its head round to see its admired one, the cuckoo.

The blacker, more criminal idea of the cuckoo has found its way into the great dramas of the world with Oidipous — “Swell-foot the Tyrant” — by Sophocles. The

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swollen foot seems an echo of the feathered legs of the cuckoo. The crimes of Oidipous consisted of his slaying the father, who, because of a menacing prophecy, had sent him away, and of his marriage to his own mother. His fate includes the crime of Conchobar of Ireland, who married his mother, and Kullervo of Finland, who killed his father-uncle, perhaps, also, Kalevipoeg of Esthland, if we regard the Finnish magician as his real father. When the mother of Oidipous discovers the situation,



she kills herself, just as Aino drowns herself because of Vaino, and the sisters of Kullervo and Kalevipoeg throw themselves into the water.

In connection with Oidipous we find the sphinx, who puts each aspirant to the kingship a question he cannot solve and kills him when his ignorance is shown. Pausanias explains that the sphinx, that four-footed creature with head and breasts of a woman, was the daughter

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of Laius, the father of Oidipous. Her puzzle was a family question that no one who was not truly a son of Laius could answer; thus she kept false pretenders from the throne.

Having now the clew in the cuckoo to the Laius-Jocasta-Oidipous legend, the question arises what the sphinx might be. I think it safe to say that the sphinx is a Greek embroidery upon the owl, her figure having been suggested by the winged lions of the Euphrates valley, familiar not only to Greek travellers, but to all who purchased from the Phœnician merchants those gold and copper vessels carved with winged beasts which were made in Asia. We get thus an explanation of the sphinxes on the helmet of the great statue of Pallas Athené in the Parthenon described by Pausanias. They were merely more elegant and artistic forms of the homely owl, the bird of Minerva, whose history I shall try to trace in the following chapter.

The Oidipous story entire has been found in

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Finland, but modernized. Two magicians who can read the future stay the night at a farmhouse where the wife is about to become a mother. They prophesy that the child will be a boy who will kill his father and marry his mother. It is a boy; and the father is for killing him, but at the mother's prayer he binds the baby to a plank and sets it adrift on the river. The plank goes ashore near an abbey; the child is reared by the monks and takes a place as farm hand with his own father. He is ordered to watch a field of turnips at night and kill any thieves; his father forgets his own order, goes out at night to gather turnips and is killed. In time the widow marries the farm hand, and one day, when the young husband is bathing, discovers by a birth-mark what she has done.

Many and most curious are the analogies between the myths and the names of Ireland on the one hand, Finland and Esthland on the other. The name of the Shannon can be

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explained as "dark-blue" from an Esthonian word. Tara's hill in Meath with its royal town, said to have been there in Saint Patrick's day, is strangely like Taara's hill in Esthland, where Kalev's son founded a city over the tomb of his reputed father. The Tuatha dé Danann, that people of the misty Druidical Irish past, famous for their knowledge of metal- and magic-making, receive a lurid light from the under-world when considered to mean "Folk of the Dark Gods" not "Folk of the Two Dananns." They are the Tõnn, Tõnni of the Esthonians, spirits whose images were used in witchcraft, the Tonndi of the Finns, kobolds and devils, denizens of Tuonela the under-world. But their pleasant traits show that they escaped the damning of Christian teachers, who always sought to degrade the heathen upper gods to evil spirits and the gods of the under-world to the depths of brimstone and hell-fire. And the Fir-bolgs, another mysterious race, over whose

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origin and meaning the Irish have allowed their fancy the widest range, may find their analogy through the Finnish *polkea*, to overthrow, oppress—the meaning being the oppressed tribes (*palkkamies*) namely the early Finnic tribes subjugated and in part driven westward into Connaught by their Keltic conquerors. In Irish the pawns in chess, which represent the lowest men in the social order, are called *ferbolg*, as if one said serfs. And when the *Fir-bolgs* are asked to move from the west into Ulster the old Finnic hero Cuchullaind takes them under his protection. But they are badly treated and fly to Connaught once more.

There is a strong parallel between Lemminkäinen or Ahti, god of the waters—who is the male god of love beside Lemmetär the Finnish Aphrodité—and Fion of Ireland, at least so far as certain of their exploits are concerned; in others it is Cuchullaind who furnishes the analogies. Fion and Lemminkäinen are both

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deserted by their wives. One day Fion meets a beautiful woman who is weeping for her ring which has fallen into a deep lake; gallantly he dives for it, but when he brings it up he is an old man, withered and old like Vaino. Lemminkainen tries for the hand of one of Louhi's daughters — Louhi of Pohjola, the Hag of the North. But he comes off worse than Fion. He goes to Hades at the request of Louhi, is killed and his body cut to pieces, like that of Osiris of Egypt. Fion is restored to his own shape and Lemminkainen's mother gathers up his scattered members and brings him back to life. Both derive from the cuckoo, which has lost its life or its youth in autumn, but returns in spring.

These parallels are such as to exclude the idea that they are direct transplantations from Finland to Ireland, or from Ireland to Finland, since they vary from each other in too many particulars. They testify to a common origin which lies so very far back that we must

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believe them survivals from a common stock, belonging to a race whose language and ideas at one time ruled Europe, and whose dialects, where they happened to survive, differed at that remote epoch comparatively little the one from the other. Fion's cuckoo traits are seen in the adventure of Oisín's captivity in a cave. Oisín the son of Fion is caught by fairies in a cave; but he snips off a piece from the shaft of his spear each day and casts it into a stream. Fion, searching for his boy, sees the chip and rescues him. This is the cuckoo reared in a nest from which it cannot escape.

The Slavic nations, with whom in the past as in the present Finns and Esths have been in closest contact, were great favorers of the cuckoo. The Poles called him *Zezula*; in heathen times they had a goddess *Zywie* with a temple on Mount *Zywiec*, where they prayed for health and long life. It recalls the cuckoo-mount near Mases in Corinth with its temple to Zeus, erected because Zeus



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turned himself there into a cuckoo. This goddess was thought to have turned herself in like fashion into a cuckoo. When the sound of the cuckoo call first strikes your ear in spring, or even first in the morning, you must have some gold or silver in your pocket, if you hope to be rich for the rest of the year. If you hear the call whilst hungry, you will suffer for the year from a superabundance of the "best sauce."

The latter idea gave rise to a habit which has hygienic value, namely, that of always eating a mouthful before going out in the morning; it is prettily expressed by a word in *Kalevipoeg*, Canto XI, line 3, where *linnupete* is found. Before he sets out to wade across Lake Peipus, lazy giant, Kalev's boy takes a *linnupete*. *Linnu*, lind, means bird, *pete* deceit; *linnupete* means the bird deceiver; something that defeats the magic of birds. Wiedemann explains this word as: "Breakfast, which is taken, through superstition, in spring

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before going out, in order not to hear the cuckoo on an empty stomach." Perhaps this testifies more powerfully than the legends of cuckoo heroes to the vast background of belief in bird magic and bird prophecy, a faint sketch of which I am trying to trace.

The Egyptians, too, had their stories which point to the cuckoo as their visible starting-point. There is that of Osiris and his sister Isis, whose son was the hawk Horus. Osiris is cut to pieces like Lemminkainen, and his scattered limbs are found and collected by his sister-wife, as Lemminkainen's by his mother.

"It is this, the beneficent, the avenger of her brother" says the Hymn to Osiris translated from the stele in the Bibliothèque Nationale by M. Chabas; "she unrepiningly sought him: she went the round of the world lamenting him; she stopped not till she found him. She shadowed with her wings; her wings caused wind, making the invocation of her

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brother's burial; she raised the remains of the god of the resting heart: she extracted his essence: she had a child, she suckled the baby in secret; none knew where that happened. The arm of the child has become strong in the great dwelling of Seb."

Here Horus is the returning spring, the son of the cuckoo that turns into a hawk, the cuckoo whose death is as mysterious as his birth.

A very curious story called "The Tale of Setnau" seems to contain the cuckoo myth in secondary form, that of the folk-tale, where the crime of marriage between brother and sister is made to entail disaster. So far as we can see the marriage of Isis and Osiris did not occasion the mutilation of the latter. But the tale of Setnau found in a papyrus begins with an enforced marriage between Ptah-Nefer-Ka and his sister Ahura, although each desires to marry some one else. Soon are developed the avenging fates! The brother insists on raising

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a book of magic from the bottom of the sea ; whereupon, first their child Merhu, then Ahura, and finally Ptah-Nefer-Ka, plunge into the Nile and are drowned. Egypt, we remember, is the land where the royal family was condemned to the closest interbreeding, even as late as the Ptolemaic line. Such tales bear out the belief that the bird heads seen on the sceptres of the gods in Egyptian mural inscriptions are heads of cuckoos.





## Paan the Peacock ~

### CHAPTER V

**T**HE peacock, "with his aungelis clothis bryghte" is a synonym for brainlessness; the small size of its head, its harsh voice and the ugliness of its legs have been contrasted in witty antithesis with the extraordi-

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nary splendor of its crest, neck and long wing coverts, and the haughtiness of its demeanor. Those who have not seen the cock bird making love to the demure hen have missed one of the most curious sights. After strutting for some time with his fan of gorgeous plumes upright, he will approach his partner, and, with a trembling in every plume well calculated to bring each glister and glint of color into play, and at the same time to produce a gentle humming sound, he will gradually curve the long feathers forward over himself and her, until the two stand in a green-gold bower of beauty.

Whether it was merely the superbness of the feathers of the peacock, or also the fact that the bird gives its calls before rain, and in its native wilds issues a hoarse warning of the presence of its foe, the tiger — at any rate in its wild and half-tamed state in Ceylon and South India it has always been a magic bird, protected from extinction by the super-

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stition that to kill it was to offend a god. Doubtless in earlier days and in its simpler form this belief considered the peafowl as the embodiment of some god of the forest whose resentment it were wise not to rouse. For several centuries at least it has been the special companion of Subhramanya, a son of Vishnu.

From Ceylon to Lapland seems a far cry, but there are many instances of analogies between far separated ideas and things which would seem improbable to us, if they were not so familiar. Families in Scandinavia and England bear the lion in their crests or coats; yet the lion is not known to have penetrated Europe or central Asia. I do not mean to say that the peacock reached Lapland as a bird god or the animal emblem of a god; yet, being transportable, it did reach Europe, notwithstanding the fact that it is not a native and reached it to become the emblem of various deities.

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The best known of these is Juno or Hera, whom we have already spoken of as cuckoo-like in her relation to Zeus. Her proud chariot is drawn by peacocks, birds whose introduction into Greece from India is ascribed to Alexander the Great, though their attribution to Hera shows that they must have been highly prized long before. Indeed Solomon, that ruler of the demons and birds as Mohammedans know him, imported peacocks from India. If we place Solomon about 950 before Christ, the date is not far removed from that at which, according to Terrien de la Couperie, the Chinese first saw the Indian bird. What store the Chinese set by its feather we all know; its presence in a cap signifies a high rank. Europe must have had plenty of time in which to have made certain changes of fashion in the birds attached to certain deities before the Greeks arrived in Greece, and, learning the use of the alphabet from the Phœnicians, set down the attributes



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of the various gods in writing for the benefit of Europe in after ages.

It is a characteristic of folk-tales and ballads by the people's bards to ring the changes on some few notes, to revamp the same plot, retell with superficial variations the same story. In the Finnish legends the doings of Vaino, the old and the sage, of Ilmarinen, the inventive and firm-spirited, of Lemminkainen and Youkahainen, the young and flighty, often overlap, so that



it is plain they are but variations on one original godhead. Vaino has won the right to the hand of Youkahainen's sister Aino by vanquishing that young upstart of a Druid in wizardry; but Aino shows her relationship to the various luckless sisters of cuckoo gods by drowning herself rather than marry him. In the ballads as we have them the reason is no longer a discovery of unlawful closeness of blood; it is incompatibility of age. We have

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in the first chapter noticed Aino after she suffered a sea change; here she is about to take the leap.

The violence of Aino's grief betrays the fact that something worse than merely marriage with an old man lies behind her words. She is the same person as Syrinx, the nymph who flees from Pan and turns to a reed rather than yield to his embraces. Vaino's bride exclaims :

Better had it been for Aino  
Had she never seen the sunlight,  
Or if born had died an infant,  
Had not lived to be a maiden  
In these days of sin and sorrow  
Underneath a star so luckless !  
Needed then but little linen,  
Needed but a little coffin  
And a grave of smallest measure.

As Aino leaps into the water she addresses her sister in words that bring the Finnish nymph very close to Syrinx of Arcadia :

Sister dear, I sought the sea-side,  
There to sport among the billows.

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With the stone of many colors  
Sank poor Aino to the bottom  
Of the deep and boundless blue-sea,  
Like a pretty song-bird perished.  
Never come to lave thine eyelids  
In this rolling wave and seafoam,  
Never during all thy lifetime,  
As thou lovest sister Aino.  
All the waters in the blue-sea,  
All the fish that swim these waters,  
Shall be Aino's flesh forever ;  
All the willows on the seaside  
Shall be Aino's ribs hereafter ;  
All the seagrass on the margin  
Will have grown from Aino's tresses.

*(Kalevala, Rune IV, Crawford's translation.)*

The separation of Vaino from Lemminkainen and Ilmarinen, and the separation of all three from Pikker must be very ancient ; for as Pikker, the Finnish god of thunder, leads back to Italy and discovers Picus, so Vaino leads thither and discovers Faunus. But Faunus is no other than Pan of the old Arcadians in Greece. Vaino, Faunus and Pan

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have a Keltic namesake and parallel in Fion of Ireland, whose troops were the Fianna or Fenians. If the latter are not given the hairy legs and horns of the Pans, Panisci, Fauni, they were nevertheless creatures of the woods who lived all summer in the open and only quartered themselves in winter on the country folk.

The variation of *P* into *F*, of *F* into *V* or *W*, is a matter of little moment; these names are the same, though they appear so far apart and in so many differing tongues. What was formerly called Finntraighe in Ireland is now Ventry. The island of Ventotene, west of Naples, is the ancient Pandataria. The name of Pan was Phan in one part of Greece; and we may safely interpret the name of the bird phoenix, and the name given by the Greeks to the sea-faring inhabitants of Canaan, the Phœnicians, as at root the same as the name of the Arcadian god. The ideas of brightness and redness we may hold to be of later invention,

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after the tongues which might have explained the root had disappeared from Greece.

Pan was a far older god on classic soil than Zeus or Apollo or Hera or Mercury — gods who usurped certain parts of him, gods who show his attributes separated and differentiated. In a language like Finnish the vowel in Pan would be broken up into several, as we see by his parallel, Väinämöinen. We see the same in Pan's name in oldest Greece: Paian, Paieôn. The Greeks of Aryan blood, the intrusive Greeks, did not ignore him entirely when they dispossessed him from Olympus and enthroned Zeus there, when they forced him to give quarters to Apollo on Mount Lycæus. Homer speaks of him as Paian, or Paieôn, the healing god, as Welcker pointed out long ago. The worshippers of Phœbus Apollo merely repeated his name when they shouted their "pæans" and it is again the name of this old god which we find in that of the Paiônes, tribes of Thessaly and Macedonia who spoke

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quite another tongue from Greek and later gave their name to Pannonia.

Pan, then, once the chief god of all that part of Europe, has a parallel in Vaino among the Finns. As the latter is always unfortunate in love, as he pursues Aino till she drowns herself, so Pan is rarely successful; in the case of Syrinx he loses her on the borders of the stream. Vaino invents the kantelé; Pan, the pipes. The form we meet him in among the Aryan Greeks is a mere fragment of what he was: for he has parted with his thunder to Zeus; his eloquence and song and sun traits and ill success with nymphs to Apollo; his magic to Mercury; his water craft to Neptune. When Pan reaches out to seize the lovely, fleeing Syrinx by the hair and grasps the blades of the reeds, he consoles himself with the pipes that he fashions from them. Vaino is an "all-round" god who fashions his harp from the head of a giant sturgeon or pike, and while driving off his

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own melancholy by music, is also intent on improving his people by what he sings.

We only know Pan as the god of shepherds and rustic Arcadians rebellious to the military tyranny of the Laconians, a deity of the earlier folk of Greece who retired before the Dorian Greeks, conquerors of the Peloponnesus, into their forests and hills. There is no reason to believe that Pan, if he was portrayed by them, was made to look like the shaggy goat god we find him in classic art. That is but a Greek way of expressing the rudeness of his effigies and the clumsy barbarism of his devotees. The Greek exercised his wit on the older populace by lampooning their god. It was not till after Marathon was fought that the Athenians admitted Pan to a place among the minor deities and dedicated a temple to him on the acropolis. Yet he is a god who has given his name, as just remarked, to several great peoples of the past—the Phœnicians, Paiônes and Pannonians, the Venedæ of the

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Baltic, the Veneti of the Adriatic, and to many cities including Vienna (the Vindobona of the Romans) and to Venice. Pan is not dead. As Finn mac Cool he lives in the fairy stories and tales of giants told in Ireland; and as Vaino he is still much more than a name in song among the Finns.

We have seen that the eagle and the cuckoo are birds that are often associated with Vaino and doubtless these are the birds that the earliest beliefs gave to him. But at a very early period the splendor of the exotic peacock made the ancient inhabitants of Greece associate that bird with a representative of the sun, such as Pan was. Later he had to part with his eagle to Zeus and his peacock to Hera; but we can guess that the peacock was first assigned to him, because in Europe, with few exceptions, its name is a variant on that of Pan and generally keeps the initial *P*, even when, as in Latin *pavo*, Esthonian *pabu*, it drops the *n*. Catalanian has an odd



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form pago; Burgundian French had paivo; but the Berry dialect retains the *n* in pante, peahen. The Irish call the peacock payal, but write the word as if it had been padgal. Identified through the gorgeousness of its feathers and especially through the spots on the long plumes, the eyes that suggest the red-gold "eye of day," it could not fail to obtain the name that referred to the sun, the day and splendor, at the same time that it meant a bird god honored throughout Europe for his prophetic minstrelsy. Roman potters often stamped a figure of the peacock with plumes displayed on their little pottery hand lamps.

We are told that the name of the peafowl used by the Greeks came with the bird from India, but was more immediately known to them under the Persian form tâwûs; and this form appears to have found lodgment in Greece alone, where it appears as tâos, genitive tâôn. That means that the Greeks did

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not carry the bird on, but the Phœnicians did; for the rest of Europe gave it names that are similar to Esthonian *paiva* and *päew*, the sun, the day. Such are Latin *pavo*, *pavonis*, Irish *payal*, Vendish *pawol*, Esthonian *pabu-lind*, German *Pfau*. It became the bird of the healing god *Paian*, whose ancient half-forgotten name the worshippers of *Apollo* called upon when they cried “*Io Paian!*” It is the Greek bird god *phaôn*, the shiner, and though in the legend of the bird *phœnix* we have astronomical ideas, yet is the creature on which the *phœnix* was based the peacock! Our word “*pea*” comes down through Anglo-Saxon *pawa* from some original sun and day term like the Finnish *paivan-lintu* “sun bird” and Esthonian *pabu-lind* “peacock.” But when we come to the eagle, we shall find him the earliest *phœnix* of all.

A characteristic of the peacock, in which he differs from many birds, is the humming noise he makes with his long feathers when wooing

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his mate. This may have been the starting-point for the musical traits in Pan, Vaino, Fion and the Fenians, of whom the latter indulged in a very odd humming sound or chant called the dordfhiann. Concerning Faunus of Italy we know very little indeed ; but of Pan of Greece, Vaino of Finland and Fion of Ireland we know that they were unfortunate in love ; their wives or chosen ones fled from them. Perhaps we find the root of this in the behavior of the peahen, who seems not only insensible to the strutting, the solar display, the arch of plumes and low humming of her pyrotechnical lover, but positively averse to him. At least she pretends to disregard his suit and constantly makes off, leaving her lord and master apparently appalled at her bad taste !

The bird of Juno seen on coins of Samos, where it is depicted standing on the prow of a galley, was all the more valued because it was not a native of Europe or Asia ; it must have

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been reckoned as a gift for princes from the grayest dawn of history. As late as in his day the Emperor Adrian presented to the Heraion in the Corinthian district a magnificent peacock in honor of Hera. It was of gold and jewels. But as early as barter existed specimens of the matchless bird must occasionally have been brought from India by land and by water. The pristine navigators of the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, whom the Greeks named Phoinikoi and the Latins Punici, must have brought, as well to Europe as to King Solomon, the phaôn or phœnix natural, not astronomical; and we may well assume that they brought it with all its religious honors thick upon it, calling it the bird of their own high god. Otherwise the old peoples of Greece and Italy would hardly have named the bird after their own great god of light and day.

Doubtless the Phœnicians merely transmitted to Europe the fame that the bird en-

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joyed in India as the warner against tigers, foreteller of rain, visible emblem with its radiate flaming wing coverts and its dark-blue neck of the rainbow itself. Associated as it was with the close of the hot term in India and the coming of the rain and the cool season, doubtless they found the *Paiônes* of the *Ægean* and of Thessaly, worshippers of *Paian*, and the devotees of *Faunus*, *Vaino* and *Fion*, as well as the *Pelasgian* dwellers on the islands of *Samos* and *Lesbos*, ready to name it after one of their most notable gods; ready to replace eagle or cuckoo in favor of the beautiful new-comer.

In *Crete* there was localized a curious story of *Katreus* (a name for the Indian peacock) king of *Crete*. His son *Althamenes* (the healer?) discovered that he was fated to slay his father, whereupon he fled to the island of *Rhodes* and built a temple to *Zeus*. But he could not escape his fate. All his other sons having died, *Katreus* set sail for *Rhodes*,

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landed, was attacked as an enemy and slain by his son before explanations could be made. Here we have the cuckoo story brought into connection with the peacock under a name that is probably not Greek at all, for in all likelihood Katreus is not a Greek name.

How readily the peacock might find its triumphant way about the world is seen in the remains of a tomb of a Viking leader preserved at Christiania. The galley of war was his coffin; his armor and weapons were buried with him. And among his belongings one sees, shining still bright after a rest of eight centuries, the plumes of a peacock embedded in a mass of charred stuff. In the Middle Ages the peacock, stuffed and brought ceremoniously to table, was a feature in various solemnities, oaths being taken on the bird. These oaths, these ceremonies, can have been no other thing than survivals from the past when the bird was after a fashion worshipped, if not as a bird, then as a symbol.

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It was on the island of Samos that the peacock became later specialized as the bird that drew the car of Hera and decorated the prows of her galleys. It was Lesbos, first inhabited by Pelasgians, that produced one of the seven wise men of Greece, also two of her greatest poets. Alcæus the poet and Sappho the poetess, who gave their names to special rhythms in verse; Pittacus the wise, whom Alcæus satirized — these are called historical persons. But their names cast a suspicion on the rest of Greek history. Two bear the names of birds. Alcæus is the halcyon, the kingfisher, fabled to cause the winds to cease until its eggs are hatched in its floating nest; Pittacus is psittacus the parrot. Pythagoras, the mystic, far-travelled philosopher, was born in Samos, and though no well-defined bird traits are recorded of him, he seems to have flitted bird-like about the world — India, Crotona, Sicily — and certainly had the attributes of Vaino. He predicted storms and earthquakes, tamed with one

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magic word the Daunian bear, taught the transmigration of souls, was said to have learned his philosophy in "Scythia." And whatever may lurk beneath the great name Sappho—perhaps Shamas, the sun god, perhaps also the Sampo of the Kalevala—it is a name associated with that of Phaôn, the peacock.

Phaôn, it will be recalled, was a favorite of Aphrodité. She presented him with an ointment, by applying which to his person he became the most beautiful of living men. Sappho had a hopeless passion for him and threw herself from the Leucadian Rock into the sea, where Aphrodité was said to have drowned herself for Adonis. The connection of birds with Phaôn and with the Leucadian Rock is dimly felt through the story Strabo tells of criminals being thrown from this rock as a punishment. Their friends were allowed to attach birds to them, and if, thus buoyed up in the air, they reached the water alive, they were picked up by boats in waiting and



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allowed to depart into exile. Here we seem to have a human sacrifice to a bird god analogous to Pan (Phaôn) for whose sake Sappho herself was said to have taken the fatal leap.

Pan is indeed a mysterious and little-understood deity. Were we to take only what the Greeks have vouchsafed to say of him, we would not learn much. But with the clew of bird traits and bird origins in our hand, we can find Pan under many disguises.



The Greeks degraded him ; or perhaps it were truer to say that they exalted other gods, their own special gods, above him. Thus in the career of Apollo we find fragments of the career of Pan ; because, as we have seen, Apollo ousted Pan and absorbed many of his attributes, such as mastery in song, divination, bowmanship, eloquence — even Pan's hard luck in love.

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But we find Pan more clearly in a reputed son of Apollo, the sweet singer Orpheus. If we want to make a reasonable guess at the god-lore taught to the intrusive Greeks by the subject *Païônes*, let us look at the doings and beings of Orpheus. And then we find a bright side-light thrown by Vaino of the Finns, whose exploits were, in many ways, singularly like his. Vaino and Orpheus had the same mysterious birth ; both were teachers of the people and founders of states. Both were charmers of men and maids with music and song, nay, the birds and beasts and inanimate objects —

All the beasts that haunt the woodland  
Fall upon their knees and wonder  
At the playing of the minstrel,  
At his miracles of concord.  
All the songsters of the forests  
Perch upon the trembling branches,  
Singing to the wondrous playing  
Of the harp of Wainamoinen.  
All the dwellers of the waters  
Leave their beds and caves and grottoes,

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Swim against the shore and listen  
To the playing of the minstrel,  
To the harp of Wainamoinen.  
All the little things in nature  
Come and listen to the music,  
To the notes of the enchanter,  
To the songs of the magician,  
To the harp of Wainamoinen.

*(Kalevala, Rune XLIV, Crawford's translation.)*

The adventures of Vaino, Ilmarinen and Lemminkainen while bringing back the Sampo from Pohjola have dim resemblance to those of Jason, Orpheus and the other heroes on their trip to Colchis : notably the attack on the Finnish heroes by Louhi in the shape of an eagle bearing armed men resembles the attack of the Stymphalian birds on the Greek heroes.

But we must beware of supposing that a Greek poem like the Argonautica of Apollonius of Rhodes was imitated in the north. The differences are too great. Each appears to have grown spontaneously ; only a very remote common origin can be imagined for both.

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These parallels do not suggest the derivation of one god from the other, nor of one legend from the other, but a provenance from some early universal stock. Vaino and Orpheus visit the under-world, Vaino to obtain three words of magic in the belly of Antero Vipunen wherewith to build a boat—the Finnish Argo perhaps. Orpheus made his ever-memorable trip to hell to regain his wife, as Vaino and Ilmarinen go to the shadow land to obtain spouses. Like Vaino, Orpheus was soothsayer, enchanter, instructor of his people, inventor of the lyre; and his name seems to come from the notion of the father-and-motherless one, the “orphan,” in which respect he resembled not Vaino alone, but Arthur, but Kullervo and Kalevipoeg, Merlin the old Briton, Fion and Cuchullaind of the Irish.

Vaino's intended wife went off with Ilmarinen; the wife of Orpheus was pursued by Aristæus, another son of Apollo, until she found refuge in Hades, under which form of

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the legend we see clearly enough the ill-luck with women that followed Vaino and Fion and Pan. No doubt in the earlier legends she fled wittingly. Even in that which we have Orpheus completes his bad luck by looking back and breaking the charm, whereupon Eurydiké flees down again into hell, from which it may be she came with reluctance. Orpheus comes to his death through women who tear him to pieces, while Pan, constantly teased and tormented by nymphs, was bewailed as dead; while Fion of Ireland is forced to see Grainné his sun-maiden elope with Diarmuid the irresistible. Pan and Vaino have also more serious adventures with women, as we have seen.

Pan's bird of grandeur was the eagle, but that was so long ago that the earliest Europeans must have been at the time in the same stage of culture as American Indians. On the west coast of America there is a belief in the Eagle of the Zenith, a gigantic bird too high

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up in the air to be visible, which yet perceives all that exists and moves on earth and sometimes descends in some awful visitation of nature. When he shakes his feathers, thunder rolls, hail and snow fall. The phoenix and the peacock, for they are one and the same bird, were used by the very early Christians to symbolize the resurrection from the dead. But the Christians of the Middle Ages did not copy them, for they found a chance to moralize about the bird and class it among the suspicious adjuncts of heathen gods.

Perhaps with the relegation of Pan to the devils by the Christians the peacock became that synonym for the lusts of the flesh which we find it in the Middle Ages. That must also account for the idea that peacock feathers are unlucky; they were badges of the heathen when Christianity was still fighting for its life in northern Europe. The writer of Job seems to have no such prejudice against the bird, for God says scornfully to Job: "Gavest thou the

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goodly wings unto the peacock, or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?" and proceeds to score the foolishness of the ostrich, but has no word to say against the peacock. It remained for the Middle Ages to cast odiousness upon this magnificent creature and to exalt into a favorite charge of coats of arms the "Pelican in its piety" — as ugly and stupid a bird as one can find on the Nile. Yet those men of the Middle Ages who did not moralize esteemed the peacock scarcely less, since we know that knights and esquires took an oath on the king's peacock, which was called the *vœu du paon*.

In these considerations of ancient bird gods in Europe I do not wish to be understood to confine the men and demigods noted to an exclusively bird origin. I wish to call attention to a neglected field of mythology and folklore, by studying which very many anecdotes and actions, which otherwise must seem quite arbitrary, if not foolish, take their places in

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rational sequence. I am trying to show the singular power of the imagination in taking some one striking fact, like the drumming of the woodpecker, the fosterage among cuckoos, the radiance of the peacock, and evolving from that simple cell the marvellously varied structures of mythology and fairy-tale, folk-lore, epic and drama, to delight, startle, instruct and awe the successive generations of men.







**'Tis nothing but a little downy Owl."**

## CHAPTER VI

**I**T was near midnight ; the moon had laid the Colosseum with broad sheets of white on dark as I stood in the ancient arena and pondered — how to be rid of a small Italian, a self-imposed guide, who was keeping up a chatter in German, French, English and Italian, each bad of its kind and all impartially mixed.

Then up in the arches against the sky resounded a strange, not altogether unfamiliar sound — a screaming call that suggested the cry of the whippoorwill.

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“I care nothing for the Colosseum and its history, my small friend,” said I, “but much for that creature screaming up there! What is it?”

“O — that? That is only a bruto uccello, cattivo! an ugly bad bird that comes to people when they are sick and tells them they must die!”

Passing through the streets of Rome next day I came upon a seller of owls — poor little fellows fastened securely to the top of a pole by one foot. Every now and then one would fall from the top and flutter helplessly, hanging by the leg. In such guise they are in demand as lures for small birds, which hate them so bitterly that as soon as they catch sight of them they are readily inveigled into traps or on to limed twigs. Otherwise owls are kept like cats or tortoises to free gardens from small vermin.

The owl as an evil omen and the owl as a lure, these are the two phases under which a

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harmless and most useful little bird is known to most people, not only in Europe, but in Asia and America. Its broad eyes that seem at night to shine with an inner light, its big head and high forehead, its mysterious feather-light flight and the disconcerting harshness of its cry have always given it an uncanny repute. Why has the witch always been more feared than the wizard, at least in historical times? For some reason the small owl has generally been connected with the female sex. Not only was it the bird of the Maiden Maid, patroness of spinning, embroidery and the olive-orchard among the greatest of mankind, the classic Athenians, but it is still the woman's bird among the lowest of races, the blacks of Australia. Many of these tribes use "owl" as a synonym for "woman" and believe that when an owl is killed some woman's death is sure to follow. The women on the other hand call men "bats"; the death of a bat, so they believe, portends the death of a black fellow.

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The small owl is female in most languages — Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Lusatian-Vendish, German, French, Icelandic, Welsh, Hungarian. In English, Finnish and Esthonian the sex is not distinguished; but I think that we generally consider the little owl feminine, as we do the cat, although Tennyson and Keats make the great white owl masculine —

Alone and warming his five wits,  
The white owl in the belfry sits —

and

The owl for all his feathers was acold.

This bird was in the Bible classed amongst those to eat which was “abomination”; though why the owl, the cuckoo and the swan should have been placed on the black list in Leviticus has not been explained, nor will it seem clear unless we allow for the connection of each of these birds in the minds of the ancient Hebrews with heathen gods who originally were bird gods and dragged their attendant birds after them into “abomination.”

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Shakespeare must mean the owl when he says in his mystical Phoenix and Turtle :

But thou, shrieking harbinger,  
Foul pre-cursor of the fiend,  
Augur of the fever's end,  
To this troop come thou not near!

And before him Chaucer remarked of the owl that "wonde" or stayed all night on the "balkes" or beams of the house, that it was a foreteller of woe —

The owle al nyght aboute the balkes wonde,  
That prophete ys of woo and of myschaunce.

The European form of Christianity has been hard on birds, harder than Judaism. Perhaps it is for that reason one sees so much cruelty exercised toward birds in Italy, where at the hands of a ruthless race of men Christianity has been perverted from its original beauty. Like other heathen peoples the Etruscans and Romans at least revered, at least feared the birds whose cries and devious flight seemed to foretell the future.

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But the shocking form of religion evolved by the wickedness of the Middle Ages allowed the destruction and torture of hapless birds and beasts without remorse and with scarcely a rebuke.

In the island of Lesbos there existed a legend like that of Lot and his daughters, come down to us through Greek sources, in which the fair Nyctimené did not know, when the crime occurred, that it was her father Opopeus with whom she sinned.



On learning what she had done, she fled to the woods, where Pallas Athené took pity on her and turned her into an owl. In Welsh legend Blodeued the wife of Llew is turned by Gwydion into an owl, because she betrayed her husband to death. Pallas is thoroughly mixed up with this bird, as we shall see; it was no mere chance that gave her the owl.

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Nyctimené (nux the night) evidently means the night creature; her father's name Opopoeus is plainly that of the hoopoe (upupa); therefore the legend itself is one more example of bird myth humanized, like the crimes of heroes and heroines already traced back to the natural history of the cuckoo.

The fact that the owl is useful to husbandmen in ridding the grain fields of mice, which often bring famines by a sudden vast increase in their numbers, only confirmed the owl as a symbol of the Immortal Maid. These little screech-owls which are said to have been always common about the acropolis may well have protected other crops from mice beside grain, the olive for instance, a branch of which accompanies the owl on Attic coins. In Germany its names are many: Kauz is the commonest, but corpse-bird, corpse-hen, death-owl, sorrowing mother, indicate the superstitions to which its nocturnal habits and startling cry have given rise. In Austria one of its

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names is Wichtl, little wight, little kobold, suggesting a certain fondness for it on the part of the people. In Germany the Eulenflucht in barns is a triangular hole left in the gable to permit owls to enter and destroy mice.

The usefulness of the small hooter must have been known to the ancients about the Mediterranean; it certainly is to the moderns. In Austria, Greece and Italy it is commonly tamed or turned loose in gardens with clipped wings in order to keep down insects, slugs and mice. Small birds and bats are its prey; a singular habit of bowing and swelling up its feathers in a comical fashion makes it an amusing pet. The lively way in which the owl attacks and kills birds of its own size must have aided in keeping it long as a symbol of the warrior goddess; for many centuries it accompanied her head on Attic coins. But these are merely minor matters that confirmed its popularity in despite of a



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sinister repute. More important was its position as luctifer "sorrow-bringer." As a haunter of moonlight and dusk it held its own place among the gods and half-gods of earliest Europe.

Who Pallas Athené herself was, is one of the many puzzles of Greek mythology; yet it may be the little downy owl shall offer us a clew.

Just why Pallas Athené should have had the owl for her symbol the ancients never satisfactorily explained, nor have the moderns done so. Certainly it must have been for reasons more cogent than the fanciful one that the owl is a wise bird because it looks so solemn and was therefore given to Pallas because she was a wise goddess.

The owl is the glaux, glarer, with its round yellow eyes; Pallas is called glaukōpis, glaux-eyed, because — she could see in the dark like an owl to carry off men's souls!

This was her office at the period when she

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was the bride of Vulcan and did many things her worshippers afterwards suppressed. Much later must have been the epoch when the classical Greeks, who hated ugly things more than bad logic and inconsistency, raised her to the severe beauty and serenity of the chaste, warlike goddess, the Brunhild of Greece and at the same time the goddess of the spindle and of wisdom.

Pallas of Athens had other symbols among living things, notably the serpent, which coils about her altar in Attika as it does in an Etruscan tomb-painting about the altar of Minerva. Pausanias suggests that this serpent is the symbol of the old King Erichthonius of the aborigines. But she had the cock also, as one perceives from many a beautiful old Greek vase whereon she is depicted standing in her stiffest hieratic attitude between two columns, on each of which is a game-cock. This is pre-eminently the bird of the dawn and must have been assigned

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to Pallas as soon as it was introduced from the Orient, notwithstanding its masculine sex; perhaps because at that early period the Maid had not become so definitely not-male as later on. The owl is not only the bird of dusk, but of moonlight, and as it is a European fowl, not an importation, like the cock, peacock and pheasant, must be held the earlier symbol of the two. Some early coins of Athens show a crescent moon along with owl and olive branch, others, somewhat later, three or four crescents with or without the owl. Since such symbols are generally in the nature of footnotes explanatory of the meaning of a god, we may safely consider that Pallas Athené was originally a deity of the night, rather than the day. Since owl



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and serpent infest caves of the rock, we may consider her allied to the earth, that is to say, of the race of the giants and of the powers of darkness under the earth. We have seen in the last chapter how the Greeks of the time of Perikles placed the woman-headed winged lion on her helmet instead of the owl. This creature, like the eagle-headed lions or griffons on the sides of the helmet, are symbols of the power of Athené.

She is perhaps a form of Selené the moon (Diana) and is own sister to Aurora the dawn. She and Aurora have the same family connections. She got her name Pallas, according to Greek tradition, from the giant Pallas, grandson of heaven and earth, cousin to Aurora. Another version of him is humanized into a son of Pandion, an ancient king of Arcadia, who is no other than Pan, the great primitive Turanian god. Pallas Athené is therefore descended from Pan, and gets her epithet Paionia from the older form of Pan's name,

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Paiéôn. Another epithet is Pandrosos "all-dew" indicating once more a dusk and moon divinity. In Italy the goddess Minerva's name is explained by Isaac Taylor as Etruscan for "heavens-red." She and Pallas represent a being like the daughter of Mana in the Kalevala of the Finns—that dread spectre of the under-world—and it may well be that the "Men" in Menrfa and the "Man" in Manala are the same word.

Our goddess's miraculous birth should not be forgot when we try to find her original meaning below the surface of her worship in classical Greece. Remembering that Pan was before Zeus, not as the goat-foot, but sovereign of the day, the sun and weather, the peculiar circumstances of the birth of Pallas Athené receive explanation. It will be remembered that she sprang full-armed from the head of her sire. So does the dawn rise above the head of the sun, spring from its head, as it approaches the horizon; so does the moon

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take fire from — as it were spring from — the head of the sun as the latter sinks to rest. There is reason to believe that the primitive peoples imagined one office of the moon and the dawn to be the purely feminine one of bathing and refreshing the sun during the night after his toilsome, dusty passage across the heavens, sending him cleansed and bright next morning to run his course again.

By the time of the Homeric poems the names of gods taken from peoples not originally Greek had become Greek property and stories regarding these gods had branched off into a hundred different versions with various godlike persons in the title roll. The bards had already exercised their wits in explaining the names of gods and heroes from Greek roots, just as in our epoch the Irish bards explained non-Keltic names of gods and heroes through Keltic roots. Take Ulysses for an example. The Greeks called him Odusseus, explaining the name as the “hated” one. But the

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Etruscans with Uluxé and the Sikulians with Oulixes retained the earlier pronunciation. We have seen that Æneas the dove hero was the son of Aphrodité and took his name from oinás, dove. Throughout his life Ulysses was the pampered favorite of Pallas Athené the owl goddess ; in his name Oulixes, Uluxé we find the ululation of the owl !

This explanation of Ulysses will not seem so hazardous if one take the trouble to recall his relations with bird gods and remember certain main lines in his life. His adventure in stealing the Palladium from Troy was a night affair ; so was his expedition from Ææa to Hades a night expedition ; and as an owl god his visit to the infernal regions was in character. The slaughter of the suitors of Penelope was like the vengeance the owl takes on the birds its mockers when evening comes ; and indeed Pallas Athené is with him at the time in the shape of a bird. He visits Kirké, the poisonmixer and witch

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of *Ææa*. *Kirké* means "she-hawk"; she was the daughter of King *Æêtes* (eagle) of Colchis. The universal cuckoo myth then returns. After he leaves *Kirké*, she bears his son *Telegonos* ("born-afar-off") who when grown up lands on Ithaka in search of his father and kills him, not knowing who he is.

Penelope the weaver, the wife of owl-wise Ulysses, is of bird origin too, a daughter of *Icarius*, in whom one finds the wings of *Icarus* again, and first cousin to *Helen*, the egg-born daughter of *Leda* (swan) and of her mortal father *Tundareos*, the woodpecker; therefore first cousin likewise to *Pollux*, whose name, as we shall see, means owl.

And speaking of weaving, I am minded of the *Mæonian* nymph *Arachné* who contended with *Pallas Athené* in that useful art and was turned by her into *arachné*, a spider. In this legend we are close upon the explanation of that great puzzle for archæologists on which *Max Müller*, *d'Arviella* and others have



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written so learnedly, not to speak of Americans like Thomas Wilson ("The Swastika": Smithsonian Publications) namely the fylfot or swastika or cross with bent ends. This sign refers to weaving and was a short-hand picture of the spider!

The discovery on ancient shell ornaments from the American mounds of carvings of spiders with a cross on their backs gives the opening link in the chain. Schliemann's find of innumerable spinning whorls and weights of terra cotta and stone bearing the cross symbol deep down in the strata of burned cities at Hissarlik gives another link. The beautiful American spiders with crosses on their backs, the European and Asian cross-marked spiders and the form of the central webs of spiders all the world over give yet another. The symbol of the cross has not migrated from India, as Mr. Wilson suggests, because the prophetic web-spinner is everywhere. Everywhere men have observed that

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the spider foretells clear weather or storm by its peculiar ways of acting ; nearly everywhere it is a symbol of luck. Spiders foretold their fate to the Thebans when, on the death of Philip of Macedon, they dared to revolt against Alexander the Great. The spider can make itself invisible by rapidly vibrating its web. Its marvellous ingenuity, patience and spirit ; its courage and powers of disappearance and prophecy marked it from the earliest ages as a symbol. Its most prominent marking, the cross, must have become at remote epochs a sign for the creature and for its wonderful trait, spinning.

The shell gorgets in American mounds were probably useful as well as decorative. Hence the prevalence of the cross on early thread bobbins and spindle whorls round about the earth, also on embroideries, woven and plaited cups, dishes and baskets, useful objects that were copied afterwards in pottery or stone, which copies have come down to us in the lands

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about the Mediterranean as well as in the United States, while the woven and plaited originals themselves have perished. When found on the breech clouts of ancient idols, or the arms and legs of rude statues, the swastika has generally no reference to the god, but refers to weaving and merely represents a decoration on the clothing of these figures. Later, in America and Europe, it became a symbol of the four points of the compass and of rain and perhaps, still later, of the sun in relation to the weather, not the sun as a wheel or a chariot; for the symbol of the spider's cross, as we see from the American tribes who knew nothing of wheels or of a revolving sun, must antedate by many ages the discovery of the wheel.

But from this digression on the cross-marked spider as the origin of the fylfot or swastika let us return to our owls.

It is noteworthy that in Rome a festival for Minerva that lasted five days, the *Minervalia*,

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should have been held in March ; it is then that owls most cry and flit about, that being their pairing season. Naturally people who watch the sick hear the owls cry ; moreover the sick die oftenest in the early morning. Hence the cry of the owl became closely associated with night and death and the bird attained in the most remote epochs a lugubrious fame.

In the Rigveda the pious are urged to send up prayers to death and the god of death when they hear the owl call. At Rome where the *auspex* had a most elaborate ritual to comply with and minute rules to follow, he managed to distinguish no less than nine different calls of the owl. It is singular that the superstition which still ravages nurseries in Europe and America regarding cats, namely, that cats suck the breath of babies and strangle them, should have existed in Italy with regard to the owl. Pliny explains the name of the "*infanda, improba strix*" by the verb *stringere*, to throttle, because the evil bird throttles babes

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in the cradle. This idea persisting in the nursery while colleges of auspexes were succeeded by convents of Christian priests gives an inkling of what that primitive thought may have been which lies at the origin of Pallas Athené and Minerva ; it measures the strength of superstitions as to spiders, owls and such small fry in surviving the crash of empires and the downfall of vast religious systems.

Who would have thought that Pallas Athené, the wise and helpful virgin goddess, could have been evolved



from a cruel owl god of indeterminate sex, a murderous god, to whom the slaughter of men was a joy ?

Long before wisdom was associated with the deity or with the owl, Pallas Athené must have been evolved from an owl into a soul guide, into a kind of valkyr, softly flitting on owlet's wings to carry off the souls of brave men to the shades. At Orte in Central Italy

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was found a small bronze Minerva showing traces of wings and carrying an owl on her hand. The wings show that to the Etruscans she was a psychopompos, a soul guide; the owl indicates the realm of darkness. Did not Ceres turn a son of Styx into an owl because he blabbed the secret that she had eaten seven grains of a pomegranate in Hades? In the Kalevala, when Vaino goes to hell to find three words of magic, he wisely declines to eat or drink there, and thus manages to escape the conjurations and copper nets of Mana.

At Perugia there is an Etruscan tomb, on the rear wall of which two owls and a serpent are carved in relief. Owls as well as serpents are cliff and cave dwellers, hermits of darkness, and belong, if one may be allowed so grim a bull, to the ordinary livestock of the realm of death. In Florence and Rome I picked up two Etruscan scarab-shaped seals bearing the owl goddess—all owl save the head, which

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has the points about it indicating a helmet. On one the owl goddess stands in the middle, full front, flanked by a sphinx and a bird-headed quadruped, both in profile and seated. This trio of winged gods has a strong hieratic look, not so suggestive of Egypt as Assyria, like other Etruscan works of art. One thinks of the bird-winged angels carrying souls, which are found on the famous Harpy Tomb from Lycia now in the British Museum. According to the ancients the Etruscans came to Italy from that part of the world.

Seals like these were in common use to guard coffers and rooms from being opened, or to mark an animal or object for sacrifice, to identify objects or to certify ownership, or else they were used as signatures in the way common to the East; they are found in great numbers in old Etruscan strongholds like Clusium. There can be little doubt that winged figures on seals, such as griffons, bird-headed human figures, human-headed beasts

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and birds were talismans at the same time. An impression placed the object sealed under the protection of the god or demon represented. The owl seals tacitly invoked the wrath of the moon goddess or valkyr on a thief bold enough to break them.

The owl goddess of the Mediterranean had a parallel on the Baltic in comparatively recent times. Of the stone idols fashioned by the heathen Lapps some centuries ago Niurenus has stated that they were for the most part in the shape of birds. A god worshipped in Livonia is said to have flown in the shape of an owl to the island of Oesel when Christian soldiers appeared in his temple. This god was invoked by those going into battle. In 1219 priests from Germany destroyed this temple and in 1225 the Esthonian inhabitants of Oesel are said to have thrown out the idol at command of the Christians. The name of the god was Tarapilla, so we are told, but that name is the Finnish word tarhapöllö, which means the owl.



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The old writer Adam of Bremen mentions the worship of Tarapilla by the Esthonians and says that slaves without blemish were bought to be sacrificed to the owl god.

In this connection we may recall what a commentator on the Iliad states about the Palladium, the talisman on which the safety of Troy depended. It was not a statue of Pallas Athené herself, but a small wooden image of an animal. May it not have been such a bird image, or more definitely such an image of an owl as the Esthonians worshipped on the Baltic? It would not be in the least peculiar if Lapps, Finns and Esths had preserved until recent times an ancient, rude worship that represents the beginnings of the worship of Pallas Athené in Attika. At the period in question, the gods could not yet have been organized on Olympus and Pan rather than Zeus was the great god of the sun and the thunderbolt. We may consider this early Pallas a cruel god whose sex was

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doubtful, a god of soldiers, to whom captives and slaves were immolated, a deity of rapine and darkness whose visible symbol was the owl.

Concerning this god on the Baltic we have a peculiarly rude trait. When represented as a human deity he carried a long shaft of iron in place of a spear and was said to have heated one end of it red hot — not in order to chastise men at all, but to keep the lower gods and demons in order ! One thinks of Isvara, one of the forms of Siva, who picked up a red-hot iron his enemies the Rishis laid in his way and used it as a sword or club.

One thinks of Charon, an infernal deity, beating the souls with his oar, or else, as he is depicted on Etruscan coffins and ash-boxes, brandishing with a frightful scowl an axe or hammer. And one recalls the Japanese demon queller who is so great a favorite with the painters and carvers in ivory. Perhaps it was the tyranny exercised by owls toward other

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birds that suggested this to the old Finnic peoples on the Baltic when they invested Tarhapöllö with human form and a red-hot spear.

In this word tarha is merely an explanatory portion, pöllö alone meaning owl. It has a singular likeness to Pallas. If we suppose that the Aryan Greeks ended by assuming various deities of a Turanian subject-race, we can easily account for the true meaning of Pallas in harmony with her attendant bird.



Remarkable are the contrasts in the character of Pallas Athené. We can explain them only by supposing a blending of traits from various supernatural beings, just as we find that a very popular saint will sometimes absorb legends and miracles originally not his, but the property of less known martyrs. Why should

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this maid of Mars, who conquers Mars, this blue stocking, be the patroness of spinning?

In German popular songs the owl is often spoken of as a weaver, perhaps because of the odd movement of its head when disturbed.

Recall that Minerva was originally a moon goddess and the daughter of the sun ; consider how natural a simile it is to speak of the sun or moonbeams as “weaving” or of their appearance as that of woven cloth of silver or gold. Then read the Kalevala, where the daughters of the sun and moon listen to Vaino, the Turanian parallel of Pan-Orpheus, while he entrances the whole animate and supernatural world with his minstrelsy —

In their hands the Moon's fair daughters  
Held their weaving-combs of silver,  
In their hands the Sun's sweet maidens  
Grasped the handles of their distaffs,  
Weaving with their golden shuttles,  
Spinning from their silver spindles  
On the red rims of the cloudlets,  
On the bow of many colors.

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As they hear the minstrel playing,  
Hear the harp of Wainamoinen,  
Quick they drop their combs of silver,  
Drop the spindles from their fingers  
And the golden threads are broken,  
Broken are the threads of silver.

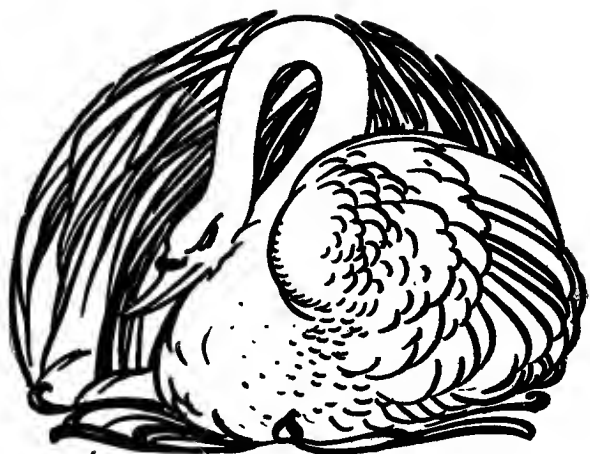
*(Kalevala, Rune XLI, Crawford's translation.)*

Here we find the origin of Pallas Athené's prowess in weaving. And while we note that in process of time she became the wisest and most sedate of goddesses, her earlier career was checkered with a number of contests with other gods, notably with Poseidon for the possession of Attika, but also with Ares, Hera, Arachné and Aphrodité. In fact she was even more than a shrew; she was a virago. This suits well the character of the owl, which is forever stirring the anger of other birds — forever in hot water — and yet, by observing a reserved and prudent conduct, manages to live its life in philosophic repose. The "mother of ruins" as it is called in Syria seems not only to have given its commonest

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name to Ulysses and its Turanian name (pöllö) to Pallas and Pollux, but by its peculiar ways to have done much to suggest the characteristics of that great goddess — a singular outcome, indeed, when we reflect with Shelley that “’Tis nothing but a little downy owl !”





## I Swear by the Swan

### CHAPTER VII

**I**T is recorded of King Edward the First of England that on a certain solemn occasion in the year 1304, his investiture as a knight, two swans decorated with gold nets were brought in, and he thereupon swore an oath to the God of Heaven on these swans. The heathen origin of this oath is plain enough; it is like the oath on the king's peacock or

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on the horse's head. It was an ancient pagan oath in the north connected with the worship of Freyr. But at first blush one would not suppose that a bit of Yankee speech, found in the United States among country people, referred to this very bird, if not exactly to the same oath.

On the stage or in the funny corner of the newspapers the ordinary Yankee from the country uses an oath or affirmation "I swan!" or "I swanny!" or "Swan toe man!" This is called by the dictionaries an attempt to disguise the word "swear," as "gosh" is used to soften, if not disguise, the name of the deity. But the dictionaries are at fault. "I swan" never meant exactly "I swear"; nor would there be any reason in softening swear to swan, as God is softened to "gosh."

Swan is just the bird; and "I swan" or "it swans to me" meant originally that the speaker had a prophetic, all-overish feeling



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that something was going to happen, and he used the term by which he knew that particular fowl, because the swan has from time immemorial been a bird of prophecy.

The same order of ideas regarding the swan has enriched the German language with an identical expression: *Es schwanet mir* (it swans to me) means that a premonitory or prophetic shudder is felt, such as is expressed by the popular exclamation "Somebody's walking over my grave!"

Let the priest in surplice white  
That defunctive music can  
Be the death-divining swan,  
Lest the requiem lack his right.

*(Phoenix and Turtle.)*

In 1440 Frederick II of Brandenburg instituted an Order of the Swan, and at Cleves there was also an order of Knighthood of the Swan, showing that swan worship lingered in ceremonies long after it had been ousted or covered up by Christianity.

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Not the magnificence of the swan merely, but this element of superstitious reverence accounts for the frequency of the swan as a crest and charge of coats of arms. Perhaps the eagle alone surpassed the swan in popularity for this purpose during the later Middle Ages and the centuries nearer our time, when heraldry began to affect the airs of an exact science and most well-to-do people, whatsoever their birth and descent, thought it necessary to set up a coat of arms. Thus in heraldry does the swan run back through heraldic devices to totemism. Among the "oath birds" which the wizards of Lapland called upon in their incantations the swan often figured. The shaman would tell how the saivo-lodde, or bird from the magic place called saivo, carried him on its back to that realm of mystery where he learned what is hidden to ordinary mortals. Hardly less potent than the eagle's feather was the feather of a swan among his stock of talismans and

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magical paraphernalia. In all the northern and western part of Europe, in the marshy, lake-strewn lands of Scandinavia, Russia and Germany, as well as among the lake regions of Greece and Turkestan, the swan was a bird to conjure with.

The large white swan, domesticated in order to grace ornamental waters, is very nearly mute; but the somewhat slenderer whistling swan (*Cygnus musicus*) sings a great deal, and indeed is particularly loquacious when wounded or dying. Observations of the mute swan caused people to assign the song of the dying swan to the most fabulous of fables; but modern bird lovers have heard the swans of Russia singing their own dirge in the north, when, having lingered too long before migration, reduced in strength by lack of food and frozen fast to the ice where they have rested overnight, they clang their lives out, even as the ancients said. Chaucer in "Anelyda and Arcite" had good reason to sing—

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But as the swan, I have herd seyð ful yore —  
Ageyns his dethe shall singen his penaunce — So  
singe I here the destynye or chaunce — How that  
Arcite, etc.

Musical swans used to come in such flocks  
to a lake near Liban that it was called the lake  
of complaining — Klagesee.

In England the musical swan seems a rare  
winter visitant now-a-days; it is supposed  
never to have bred there. Special provisions  
for breeding swans seem to have come into  
England with the Norman kings, who may  
have inherited their reverence for the bird  
from the habits of chiefs and magnates in  
Denmark and Norway, their northern ances-  
tors. It was not by chance that Edward the  
First, one of the greatest kings after the Con-  
queror, swore an oath on the swan. Fattened  
roast cygnet (a Norman word) is still eaten in  
England. By the time of Elizabeth the keep-  
ing of swans had ceased to be a royal preroga-  
tive and to-day the largest "game" of swans

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is the property of Lord Ilchester, who owns the great swannery of the Fleet on the coast of Dorsetshire.

Swans were at one time considered for their useful qualities as food, but it is doubtful if birds so difficult to keep in domestication would have been so carefully preserved in the various royal and other swanneries of England if sentiment and superstition had not worked hand in hand for their preservation. Among the ancients as well as in the twelfth century it was great luck to meet a swan at sea. While the Scandinavian tongues have the word swan it is curious that in Icelandic and Old Norse the name for the swan in common use is and was practically identical with that for fairy. Icelandic *álptir*, Norse *elptr*, *elftr*, swans, is scarcely to be distinguished from Icelandic *álfar*, *albr*, elves. It is true that the latter is masculine, while the word for swan is feminine ; but one is tempted to see a radical connection of thought between the two.

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Legends and fairy stories abound, in which men and women become swans for longer or shorter periods. They are either permanently swans or can change themselves for a time into a bird that is at home in the water and the air, a bird that fears neither darkness, nor cold, nor the dizziest heights of the sky, nor the depths of the sea ; that rejoices in snowy tracts of ice and rears its young, like the halcyon of fable, on masses of floating reeds. It may be that the great river Elbe that springs from the "sea-coast" of Bohemia, splits the realms of Saxony and Prussia in two, and reaches ocean in the ancient free commonwealth of Hamburg, was first named from the magic bird whose name was the same as elf. Elb is still the word for a fairy in German to-day, and Elb or Elbschwan is the German name for a variety of the bird, while in Northumberland elk, Welsh elyrch, is a wild swan.

Indeed it might be well to give up the attempt to explain the name of the river

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Elbe from the Latin word *albus*, white, and seek nearer home for a word formerly and still used in northern Germany.

The swan is the sacred bird at the well of Urda, the prophetess in the Edda. In the Volundärquitha three magic women, seated on the shore spinning flax, have by their sides their álptar-hamir or skins of swan feathers. When we come to speak of the Graiai, these three swan women will emerge in quite another land.

Not a little curious is it that certain small rudely-cast idols found during the last century in Mecklenburg should have a swan or goose on their heads. They were said to have been dug up on the site of a famous Vendish town called Rhetra, which in the Middle Ages lay on several hills surrounded by water from the Baltic. The waters have retired since, leaving the valleys dry. Here according to old historians was a temple of the Vends in a grove; it was destroyed by

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German armies ; and these remains certainly show the action of fire. Among the idols were some called those of Radigast, a historic god of the old inhabitants of Mecklenburg, carrying a bull's head (still the badge of Mecklenburg) in the right hand, a battle axe in the left and a swan on his head. In this case the face of the idol is not human, but that of a dog, bear or lion. A grille ornamented with the figure of a swan was found in the same hoard ; it was supposed to belong to the service of the temple. All these objects were rudely inscribed with names of gods in runic letters, which may of course have been placed on them by the finders in order to enhance the value of the idols. The swan or goose, however, would very well suit the coarsely fashioned idol of a tribe of Vends among the lakes and watercourses of Mecklenburg, since it fits exactly the accounts we have of other heathen idols about the Baltic, such as the owl gods of the Livonians, whose last resort



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was the island of Oesel, concerning which mention is made in a former chapter.

Looked at in this way, it is not so strange that swans at a very early epoch became associated with the night and moonlight, a connection which was self-evident for the owl, for instance, but not so readily seen to apply to the swan. It may have been the noise that migrating or resting swans of the vocal sort (*Cygnus musicus*) make at night; it may have been the splendor of the swan's plumage on a dark sea or against a night sky, which forced a comparison with "that orb'd maiden, with white fire laden, whom mortals call the moon." And when we consider the Baltic and the swan, it is odd that the Greek and Latin names for the swan, *kuknos*, *cygnus*, resemble strongly Esthonian *kukene*, "little moon," and perhaps do represent some very ancient reduplication of *kuu* ("moon" in Finnish and Esthonian) which was used by the original inhabitants of Greece and Italy. Perhaps this is the same

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word from which grew the Latin name for the stork, *ciconia*. The modern terms in Esthonian for swan are *kuik* and *luig*; in Finnish *luiko* and *joutsen*; in Koibal and Karagash', *kû*. Those parts of the globe which the musical wild swan still inhabits, Lapland, eastern Siberia, Turkestan, are the same which from primeval times have been the home of the Finnic nations. In central Asia the swan is still so sacred a bird that the Tatar who obtains one rides with it to the nearest yurt, where his neighbor gives him a horse in exchange for it; the neighbor then takes the swan and exchanges it for the horse of another, and so on, until the poor bird is in such bad condition that no one is willing to swap a horse for it more. Perhaps this may explain the use of "swan" in an Early English poem quoted by Halliwell (here modernized) —

Teach it forthwith throughout the land

One to the other that this book have now "swan" —

that is to say, prophetic power.

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The prevalence in Europe of the legends and fairy-tales just mentioned, in which chiefly figure youths, princesses and maidens who turn into swans, scarcely requires specification. They are found in the Arabian Nights and in Chinese tales. Usually the hero of the European tale catches the swan maidens bathing in the same way as his Chinese semblant, and by seizing one of the swanskin cloaks on the shore obtains power over the magic woman. Also he is incautious enough or sly enough in later years to show his wife the swanskin, whereupon she puts it on and flies out of the window. Another German expression to indicate uncanny knowledge is : *Es wachsen mir Schwan-federn* "swan's feathers are growing on me."

The Chinese envoy Li Tung Yuan reported from Lew Choo the legend of a swan woman whom a peasant found bathing in his well. He seized her and made her his wife for ten years. Similar tales in Persian legend and

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Irish fairy-lore could be cited if we had the space, and since the goose is often put for the swan, it may be that our phrase "I feel goose-flesh" may hark back to the time when that shudder of awe which is accompanied by what is vulgarly termed goose-flesh was assigned to



the presence of an elfin being in the shape of a bird. Of the swan maiden sort in popular thought was Berchta or Bertha of the big feet, that is, of the swan's or

goose's feet; for she is pointed out in various French cathedrals in the statue of a woman who ends in the webbed feet of a water fowl. She is *la reine Pédauque*, the mother of *Charlemagne*. She and all swan maidens, it is well known, are in fact *Valkyrs*, conductors of souls to the land of shades, who have been taken out of their ordinary rolls and given a fresh lease of life as the wives of mortal king, prince or

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lucky peasant. Such is the beautiful Suometär of Finland, of whom one reads in the Kanteletär or collection of Finnish poems. She was born from the egg of a goose and was so attractive that the sun, the moon and the northstar came down to earth to woo her for a wife.

Cygnus the swan appears in Greek mythology again and again, oftenest under the name of some ancient king named Kuknos. There was the son of Stheneleus, a great musician among the "Ligyes" far beyond the Po, in fact on the Baltic, who mourned himself to death over the fall of Phæton from the sky, whereupon Apollo turned him into a swan. The fable is well fitted to the northern land where the sun disappears for months and where peoples of the Finnic race live who call the swan luig.

In his description of Attika the traveller Pausanias has preserved the following testimony to the repute of the swan as a bird of prophecy :

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“Not far from the Academe is a monument of Plato to whom the god foretold his future greatness in philosophy. He did it thus : In the night before Plato was to become the pupil of Sokrates, the latter in a dream saw a swan take refuge in his bosom. Now the swan has a reputation for music, because a man who loved music very much, Kuknos, the king of the Ligyes beyond the Eridanus, is said to have ruled the land of the Kelts. People relate concerning him that through the will of Apollo he was changed after his death into a swan. I am willing to believe that a man who loved music may have ruled over the Ligyes, but that a human being was turned into a bird is a thing impossible for me to believe.”

Then there was Kuknos, a son of Mars or Picus, whom Herakles killed in his father's presence. When attacked by Mars, the demigod put the god to flight by a spear-thrust through the thigh. And in fact the swan flies

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before the lance of the sun god to his northern breeding grounds. A third Kuknos was a son of Neptune and an invulnerable hero at the siege of Troy. He was choked to death by Achilles—a swan slain by an eagle! True to his name, Neptune turned him into a swan.

This particular “historic” Kuknos betrays his bird origin in another way. Having had a son and daughter by a former wife, after her death he marries Phylonomé, who falls in love with her step-son Tennes. Anger at his coolness and fear of discovery cause her to slander her step-son to his father, who places Tennes and his sister Hemithea (demi-goddess) in a chest, which floats ashore on the island Leukophrys. Kuknos learns that his son is safe and goes to Leukophrys prepared to take him to his heart again, but the son rejects his advances. This is the same story as that of Kupselos, son of Eetion, who was placed in a box and committed like Moses to the

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waters. The father Eetion is plainly Greek aietos, eagle.

Doubtless these legends can be ultimately based on the floating nests which swans sometimes build, and on the fact that parent birds and their young will have nothing to do with each other after they have once been separated for any length of time.

A very singular trio in Greek mythology is that of the Graiai, called the Phorcydes because they were the daughters of Phorcus and Keto. They were hoary or gray from their birth, like the cygnets of the swan ; they had swan shapes, but only one eye and one tooth among them ! The single eye may allude to a habit of gregarious creatures of keeping one of their number ever on the alert like a vedette, though Schwartz considers it the lightning flash.

Their names suggest that in their case the idea of the Valkyr or conductor of souls from the body to the under-world was very near



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the surface. They are the guardians of the Gorgons — notwithstanding their single eye! and they have these disquieting names: Pephredo “horrifier,” Enyo “shaker” and Deino “terrifier.” Their swan nature is not expressed in music, as in the case of Kuknos, nor can they be assigned to joyful themes such as occupied the swan formerly on the island of Rügen in the Baltic. There the swan had the task that is elsewhere now-a-days given to the stork, that of bringing the newly born child to its parents.

Though the musical swan is not quite so large or so graceful as the greater swan, it has qualities that must have made a deep impression on the early peoples of Europe, Asia and North Africa at a time when it was very common because difficult to shoot with arrows. In fact a very powerful shaft would be needed, were it not to rebound from the strong feathers of the bird. The Icelanders likened the “klee-klee” and “ang” tones of this swan to the

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sounds of a violin. Pallas the ornithologist says they resemble silver bells and Olafsson says that in the long Polar night it is delightful to hear a flock passing overhead, the mixture of sounds resembling trumpets and violins. Another peculiarity of this swan that could not escape observation is its tyrannical nature; it quarrels and fights with other birds and is a nuisance when kept in captivity, if other birds are present. Moreover it is a very sly bird and keeps the sharpest watch on the hunter, so that even with firearms it is hard to approach within killing distance. Its aggressiveness toward other birds, its apparent wisdom and its known habit of flying by night make it the natural rival of the owl as a symbol of moon and night gods.

The gray color as of cygnets and the swan shapes of the Graiai, as well as their terrifying names and service as watchmen of the Gorgons, explain very well an allusion to the "swan of hell" in the Kalevala in the episode

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of Lemminkainen, demanding peremptorily the daughter of Louhi the Hag of the North for his wife :

Louhi, hostess of Pohjola,  
Made this answer to the suitor :  
“ I will only give my daughter,  
Give to thee my fairest virgin,  
Bride of thine to be forever,  
When for me the swan thou killest  
In the river of Tuoni,  
Swimming in the black death-river,  
In the sacred stream and whirlpool ;  
Thou canst try one cross-bow only,  
But one arrow from thy quiver.”

It is Lemminkainen's third trial. He has caught the magic machine that looks like a moose, the moose of Hiisi ; he has bridled Hiisi's flaming horse as Jason bridled and drove the fire-breathing oxen of Æëtes of Colchis ; but this third venture fails because he is shot from behind, like Balder and Achilles, falls into the coal-black current of the stream of death and is chopped to pieces, like Osiris. Singular that the swan, so closely

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allied in the primitive religions with death and the dead-land, should under Greek influence rise to be the symbol of genial, art-loving Apollo and rollicking Bacchus!

Among the curious statements regarding



Apollo is one that Alcaius, a name corrupted from that of the halcyon bird, leads Apollo at midsummer from the Hyperbo-reans (the north) and that Apollo is drawn along by swans. This recalls the swan-borne knight in the story of the Graal which has found its way into

modern opera. German local legends retain the idea of the swan as an uncanny bird, prophetic of death or the under-world.

Thus at Heiligensee (holy lake) a peasant digging in his garden struck an iron chain that seemed to have no end. Suddenly a black swan

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rose up near him in the water. In his fright he dropped the chain, when swan and chain as suddenly vanished. At Kemnitz in the Mark a nightwatchman averred that he could always tell when some one in the village was about to die. On such occasions, just before he cried midnight, a white swan came up out of Plessow lake and walked to the churchyard. When he saw it he did not dare call the hour. Once it appeared, went to the churchyard, but passed on to the residence of the baron. He ran home, roused his family and told them of the portent. Sure enough, within the week the baron died!

These superstitions belong to the old region where Radigast was worshipped, the god whose metal effigies found on the site of Rhetra bear the swan on their heads. The Valkyrs lingered down to this century as flying women with ice-cold hands who plague men at night and ride the fattest of the horses on farms until they lose their appetites and flesh. A

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man once caught such a "Wälriderske" in his house and made her his wife; but at last he showed her the hole through which she entered, whereupon she flew out and never came again.

The swan very naturally appears in Irish legends and especially in connection with the cuckoo hero, Cuchullaind. Fand and Liban, wives of Mananan of the sea, appear to Cuchullaind as two swans linked together by a chain of gold; when he strikes them with his spear, he falls into that state of emaciation and frenzy which was noted in the chapter on the cuckoo. In another version he falls into this condition when separated from Fand. Professor Rhys derives Fand from the same root as Latin unda; she is the primitive Undine of La Motte Fouqué's fairy-tale. On another adventure Cuchullaind finds a princess exposed like Andromeda on the sea-shore as tribute to the fog giants or pirates, the Fomori. He kills the Fomori; the rescued

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princess and her maid-servant follow him in the shape of swans. She was the daughter of the King of Lochlan, the land of lakes, variously identified as Scotland or Norway, but really the land under the sea, the under-world.

The great roll played by birds in the old Greek myths is particularly evident in the story of Leda, the mother of Pollux (pöllö the owl) and Helena (selené the moon). Leda is the same as Linda, Esthonian for bird, the mother of Kalevipoeg.

Jupiter approaching Leda in the form of a male swan rouses disgust or laughter, as the case may be ; but when we discover that such stories are the natural result of confusion in the Greek mind, owing to the variety of materials and forgotten origin of the myths, one ceases to wonder. Long before Christ the ponderer on the meaning of gods, temple ceremonials, legends and myths was the victim of lack of records. He was gazing back

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through a perspective that changed the simplest things into the most complex. A rude nature worship, akin to an Australian's for a bird or beast, had been complicated by explaining that worship as one of heavenly constellations, or of dawn, or of thunder, or of night.

Then the humanizing tendency set in and the gods of the sky were brought down to earth and mixed up with earthly men whose deeds historical were interpreted partially in a superhuman way. So it came about that a swan myth arose in which Pan, or later, Jupiter as a swan demon begat on Leda a swan-



Valkyr the lady moon Selené or Helena, as well as the warrior twins Castor and Pollux, these three issuing from eggs like the Karakutengu of the Japanese. That this is the probable origin of the Leda myth appears from what has been in the present century learned from the bal-



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lands of people embraced by Greeks and Romans under the general title of "folk beyond the north wind."

In the Kalevipoeg we read of three brothers of the north, born of the gods, the youngest of whom, Kalev, was carried by an eagle to Esthonia and there founded a kingdom. A widow of that land found in the fields a pullet, the egg of a grouse and a young crow. The pullet she placed in a brood-basket over the egg. One day she found that pullet, egg and crow had turned into three maidens — Salmé, Linda and an orphan girl or drudge. It is Linda, whose name means "bird" that Kalev wins for his bride.

Sun, moon, ocean, wind and riches come to woo Linda, but Kalev is the preferred one. He represents the eagle, just as, though for the time being a swan in the story of Leda, Zeus-Pan is oftener represented by the eagle. The time having come to break off the wedding festival —

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Kalev their departure hastened,  
Urging Linda to departure,  
Grouse-child her good-bye to utter,  
His fair swan to stop the party.

And on their sleigh-ride to the new home of  
the bride Kalev remarks —

O my Linda, O my darling,  
What at home have you forgotten ?  
Threefold things have you forgotten :  
First the Moon before your dwelling  
And he is your ancient Father ;  
Next the Sun before the bath house  
And he is your ancient Uncle ;  
Then the birch-trees at your window  
And they are your blossoming brothers,  
Are your cousins from the woodland.

The allusion to birches refers to the birch-grouse from whose egg Linda was born ; the allusion to the moon as her father refers to her poetical, mythological descent from a moon god. If their son is the cuckoo, Linda may be guessed a swan. Now with Leda, the

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mother of Castor, Pollux and Helena, the mixture of moon and bird is different in arrangement, but the analogy is clear enough to show that the Finnish-Esthonian and the Greek myths sprang from some original root. Leda's mortal husband is a bird too ; Tundareos (from a root like that of Latin *tundo*, to strike) is our old friend *Picus* the woodpecker. Moreover the career of Castor and Pollux, the *Di-oscuroi* or darkness gods on whom Greek and Roman soldiers called in battle, show that they are male counterparts of the Valkyrs or female conductors of the souls that perish in war, true sons of the swan and moon goddess Leda.

*Leukippos* (white horse) had two daughters, *Phœbe* (brightness) and *Ilæira* (joyfulness), who were to marry *Idas* (sight) and *Lynceus* (light) the sons of *Aphareus* (aphar swift). But Castor and Pollux came to the wedding and carried off the brides : the powers of night defeated the sons of day.

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In the minds of the inhabitants of Greece and Italy, before the Greeks and Latins held sway a connection existed between the swan and wine. We see that by the frequency of swans on early jars and wine-cups. On what is called the Anubis vase found at Clusium there are swans behind the dog-headed deity and behind the bearded god with wings who stands next to the Gorgon. The handles of bronze wine-strainers found in Etruscan tombs often end in a swan's neck and head. In the Etruscan Museum at Florence is a small bronze group of a young man on whose shoulders a teasing genius has alighted with a wine-cup in his hand. This genius of wine wears a most singular tall cap which is nothing more nor less than the neck and head of a swan. Here is a curious problem for archæologist and myth interpreters.

Dionysos the wine god is by some mythologists traced to a night god, and the wild revel of his train by night with torches over

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hill and dale compared to the wild huntsman legends of the north of Europe. This may be the point of contact between the swan god and the wine god. But after all the relation is as mysterious as that between the owl and the opposite to drunkenness. For it appears that owls' eggs were a sure cure for that vice in the pharmacopœia of the Middle Ages. The owl is a thing of fear; and fear sobers. There may lie the connection of ideas.





## CHAPTER VIII

**R**ELENTLESS is the destruction of our large birds of prey since the perfection of firearms. In the Eastern and Central States of America the eagle has become so rare a creature that he is often mistaken for osprey or great hawk, if there is nothing near him to show his greater size.

I remember a perfect day off Narragansett Pier, the ocean dotted with graceful yachts,

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a flotilla of huge steamboats, tugboats, sailing craft of every sort assembled at the starting-point to watch a race. With steady, superb strokes came directly from the sea an eagle. No one seemed to see him and he scorned to notice anything. He deigned neither to swerve aside nor rise far above; but steered his level way straight through the fleet on his path toward Conanicut and the mountains beyond. It was as if the last chief of the Indians of New England had passed into that dusky brown form and refused, even as a spirit, to recognize the pale-faces whose ancestors did his race to death with powder, ball and poisoned waters. Perhaps he too has fallen ere this a prey to the madness for slaughter which is one of the charms of our civilization!

If by his marvellous flight, audacity and superb aloofness the eagle has so impressed the modern world that his figure is the badge chosen for five of the greatest nations of the earth — Russia, Germany, Austria, France

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and the United States — one may guess what early men thought of a creature that was so easily the king of birds. It was enough to see a bearded eagle beat a chamois from the cliff in order to feast on its carcass, or the golden eagle rob the osprey of its fish. Who has ever seen an eagle decrepit with old age, or found an eagle's bones? No one. Well, then, the story must be true. After a few hundred years spent in domineering over the feathered and furry tribes, the eagle merely ascends at mid-day his spiral stair of air, until lost in the effulgence of the sun, whence he plunges down to the sea a rejuvenated creature. Like Herakles he enters a second life through the purifying effects of fire.

That is why in the Middle Ages the Welsh bards wrote dialogues between the eagle and King Arthur; why Charlemagne had above his palace at Aachen a bronze eagle whose beak was turned toward the nation about to be conquered; why an eagle was pictured as one of



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the animal guardians of Walhalla, where the gods of the Norse feasted ; why the symbols in war round which the legions of Rome rallied were called eagles, as a generic term, just as we should say banners or flags.

Eagles not only renewed their own life through fire, but began existence with a fire test ; for the young eagle which could not look the sun in the eye without blinking was said to be killed by its parents as a creature unfitted for the lofty career before it. Aëtites or eagle stones found in the eyry were still greatly prized two centuries ago for a variety of virtues. They are pebbles or roundish stones of clay, rusty with oxide of iron, having loose stones or crystals within their hollow hearts, and they show plainly enough the action of fire. We may guess the eagle was thought to bring these wonder stones down from the sun or from some volcano ; at any rate they cured diseases of the eyes, aided women in labor, and, oddly enough, detected thieves, perhaps because, coming from

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the sun, they shared the sun's power to reveal secrets of darkness. The eagle was said to bring them to his nest in order to cause the eggs to hatch quickly ; another proof that heat was associated with the stone.

The Simurg of Persia, as we have seen, was a god-like bird that discussed predestination with King Solomon, as the Eagle of Gwernabwy held dialogues with King Arthur. When Roodabeh is about to bear Rustem, this bird is called in by Zal and helps the princess — doubtless by bringing her an aëtile stone. The Simurg was a prophet of the good or bad to come, lived for fifteen hundred years and revived to live another fifteen centuries. This poetic form of the eagle lived on the mountain Kaf at the world's edge. He appears in India as the garuda, the eternal foe of the naga or serpent nymphs, whom he clutches in his talons and carries off to his eyry, just as the dark-colored swamp eagle seizes and feeds on serpents. His connection with the sun is plain

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enough; for he and his brother Aruna were born of an egg, like Castor, Pollux and Helena; but Aruna was the charioteer of the sun god.

It has already been noted how Kalev the god who gave his name to the land of Kalevala, the reputed father, also, of the cuckoo hero Kalevipoeg, came on the eagle's back to his own land and married Linda the swan. Kalev is the eagle himself, but in the Kalevala the more universal god Vaino or Pan is the chief; Kalev has become a mysterious giant seen in sheet lightning and certain constellations, who gives his name to the hero land.

Kalev has various analogues in Greek mythology, *Æetes* of Colchis, for instance, son of the sun and ocean, who robbed the golden fleece and was robbed of it in turn by the Argonauts. His daughter *Medea* represents *Louhi* the Hag of *Pohjola*, who also takes on eagle's shape at will, while *Medea* used a chariot drawn by dragons. The characters in the Argonaut

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story and the Finnish legend of the robbing of the Sampo do not exactly fit, but the two myths are sufficiently close to prove a common origin for Sampo and golden fleece. Kaleva, if it ever stood for eagle in a Finnic dialect, has disappeared in favor of kotkas or kokko. Now Achilles seems to be a word which once had the eagle or dragon meaning in Greek, but through dislike to the use of a god's name gradually fell out of vogue for the creature itself, just as Kaleva disappeared from Finnic.

In the chapter on the cuckoo we have seen how grateful the eagle was to Vaino, that Pan and Orpheus of the Finns, because when Vaino cleared the land of woods he left the birch-tree standing as a perch and nesting-place for birds; for this thoughtfulness the eagle brings fire down from heaven. Throughout the Kalevala the eagle is a favorite bird simile. Ilmarinen as a bridegroom is described as an eagle which has broken into the castle of young girls and seized the most beautiful of ducks.

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When he is asked by the Hag of Pohjola to fetch from the river of Mana the giant pike, before he can have her daughter for a wife, he fashions an eagle of iron, steel and flame, which at length grapples successfully with the pike and lands it from the river of death. When he and Vaino steal the Sampo, the Hag of Pohjola transforms herself into a monster eagle and bears armed men on her back over the sea in pursuit of the marauders.



One meets the eagle at every twist and turn. When Lemminkainen fails to get an invitation to the wedding of Ilmarinen and resolves to know the reason why, the Hag tries to place obstacles in his way; amongst others she causes a fiery stream to appear across his path with a fiery eagle that threatens to swallow Lemminkainen. After he has reached Pohjola, defied its inhabitants and killed the son

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of the Hag in a duel with swords, he flies home in the shape of an eagle and is pursued by a hawk, which is the spirit of the demon he has just slain.

The kindred epic of the Esths, the Kalevipoeg, has much to say concerning eagles. When the island maid learns who Kalevipoeg is, she drowns herself; her parents rake the bed of the sea for her, but bring up an old iron helmet and an eagle's egg. The island mother places this egg in the sun by day and warms it in her bed by night, until the young eagle is hatched, grows strong and escapes. Later she finds it again — but a little man is lurking under the eagle's wing, a dwarf who carries a little axe. But the little man with his little axe is able to fell the enormous tree which shuts out the sunlight from the island — that is to say, the primeval forest of Finland. He is in fact Sampsa Pellerwoinen, whom we find in the Kalevala as a little copper man doing the same miracle. It is evident that he is a

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parable for fire, which men used to carry about in a copper tinder-box; fire that like the copper dwarf rises to a giant and does more than giant's work. Fire must clear away the forests before civilization can establish itself. So here again we have the eagle and fire brought into close connection.

The great age ascribed to the eagle was known to the Welsh; only one animal outranked him, namely, the salmon of Llyn Llyw. The Mabinogion takes place after this salmon in order of longevity the eagle of Gwernabwy, the owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, the stag of Rhedynvre and the black bird of Kilgwri. And Giraldus has preserved for us the dramatic figure of the Eagle of the Eagle Mountain (now Snowdon) prophetic of wars "who, perching on a fatal stone every fifth holiday, in order to satiate her hunger with the carcasses of the slain, is said to expect war on that same day and to have almost perforated the stone by cleaning and sharpening her beak"!

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The phoenix was a symbol of the sun and there needs no guess to identify the phoenix with the eagle, especially since the eagle burns



itself into youth again by contact with the sun. Herodotus tells how its picture, which he saw in Egypt, had feathers of gold and red, and in outline and size was as nearly as possible like an eagle. It lives five hundred years, when its son brings its body from

Arabia to the temple of Helios in Sun-city on the Nile.

Phoenix the fiery red was, as we have seen when considering the peacock, a form of Pan, but we find him fully humanized as Phoenix the blind king whom the Argonauts found a prey to the Harpies; later Cheiron restored his sight; it was he according to Homer who



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instructed Achilleus and went with him to Troy ; after the death of that hero he returned to Greece to fetch Pyrrhus (the fiery one) the son of Achilleus.

This heroic descendant of a primitive eagle god, who all through the Iliad shows his eagle character by disputing over spoils, has his northern namesake in Kalev, the giant founder of Finland and the Esths. Nay, I make bold to identify the name of Achilleus not only with Kaleva the eagle god of Finland, but with the Latin word *aquila*, eagle. He was the son of Peleus the male pigeon (*peleia*) and of Thetis, a nymph of the sea, just as *Æëtes*, the eagle of Colchis, was a son of the sun born to a nymph of the ocean. All the brothers born before Achilleus were submitted to the fiery test of the young eagle ; they were placed by Thetis in the flames to burn out their mortal parts ; but they perished. Achilleus also was thrust by his mother into the fire ; but his father pulled him out. The

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great hero of the Iliad thus begins life like a young eagle with the fire test and ends it with a fire burial, not, it is true, on a pyre kindled by his own hands, as Herakles did himself to death, but one raised by the sorrowing survivors. The idea at bottom of his story is that if he had endured the fire test at birth, if his father had not plucked him prematurely from the flames in which his mother Thetis cast him, he would have been immortal like the eagle or phoenix, needing only a periodical flame bath to "renew his youth like the eagles."

We have no exact idea what the pre-Homeric Achilles was, whose name and part of whose traits appear in the hero of the Trojan war. But we are not left in the dark as to the existence of earlier beings of his name who are less realistic and human, more shadowy and supernatural. He appears as a son of Galatus remarkable for the whiteness of his hair, as if in allusion to the bald or white-headed eagle. In

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this he suggests the white-haired, white-bearded Väinämöinen. Again there was an Achilles the son of Zeus and Lamia, so beautiful that Venus became frantic with jealousy. Pan was called upon to judge in this pre-Homeric beauty contest and because he cast his vote for Achilles the angry goddess changed Pan to a hideous goat-footed creature and made him fall in love with Echo, the nymph who ever mocks and can never be found. There was still another Achilles who taught the Centaur Cheiron, who in turn was the teacher of the Homeric Achilles. Finally there was a pristine Achilles, the son of Earth, a primeval eagle of the cloudy firmament, to whom Hera fled when Zeus pursued her in the shape of a cuckoo. This Achilles persuaded Hera not to fly from Zeus, who caught her as a cuckoo on the Cuckoo Mountain. He was the eagle counsellor of cuckoo gods.



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In his "Famous Islands" old Tommaso Porcacchi tells of the island of Crete that there are birds on it called *caristi*, which fly through the fire without being at all harmed — *senza punto essere offesi volavano sopra la fiamma del fuoco*. Perhaps it is a reminiscence of the phoenix that belonged especially to Arabia, Egypt and Palestine. In the oldest tombs discovered lately on the Upper Nile by Jacques de Morgan and others the phoenix is seen rising from a bed of flames which may well mean the funeral pyre of the defunct. The inscriptions in question are so early that they belong to the period when the ceremonial of the mummy had not become universal in Egypt and the conquerors of Egypt, probably a swarm of metal-using foreigners from the valley of the Euphrates who crossed Arabia and the Red Sea, were still burning the bodies of their chiefs and kings. The phoenix of these inscriptions may indicate the soul of the departed rising from its earthly dross, as

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the soul of Herakles, according to the much later legend in its Greek form, rose from his funeral pyre to join the gods of Olympus.

Our own red Indians were not behind the primitive Europeans and Asiatics in their reverence for the eagle, as any picture of a chief with eagles' feathers in his hair will testify. A deluge myth of the Dakotah Indians explains the origin of the red pipe-stone in the Minnesota quarries, a region sacred among red men, where the seekers after pipe-stone laid aside their weapons. When the waters rose, a mass of Indians who had fled to a hilltop were overwhelmed and perished on the spot ; it is their fossil flesh which gives the pipe-stone its dark-red hue. But one woman escaped. A great eagle, who was really her father, swooped down before her and she seized his foot, so that by his aid she reached a lofty mountain. From the twins she bore descend all the red men now on earth.

Thus in the earliest myths of Greece, as in

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those of America, of Italy and the Baltic we find the bird gods acting their parts. Is it any wonder that Zeus should have an attendant eagle, whose divinity cannot be concealed, who acts as messenger to bring Hebe or Ganymedes to act as cup-bearer to the gods and bears in its talons the dread thunderbolt? When human gods were conceived of, the animal gods were not dismissed, but became their adjuncts. It is plain enough that Zeus and his eagle were once the same, just as Picus and his woodpecker, Athené and her owl.

Achilleus has a parallel in Wales in the god Lleu "light" son of Arianrhod "silver wheel" (a close parallel of "silver-footed" Thetis) and the god Gwydion. Lleu cannot be destroyed; like Samson he is a sun god in whose armor his foes can find no flaw. But he has his Delilah and she tells them how to kill Lleu. So Achilleus the invulnerable was said to have been slain because he went to a tryst he had made with Polyxena, daughter of Priam.

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When Lleu is wounded, he utters a loud cry and flies off in the shape of an eagle. Achilles, like Lleu, is the descendant of Zeus and his sister Hera. Zeus undergoes the couvade, when Typhon uses on Zeus the sickle and cuts out his "tendons." This made Zeus helpless like a woman — the couvade. Here we see in Italy and Wales the traits of eagle and cuckoo blent in one story. Achilles is called *purisoös* "fiery" and *ligyron* "shrill." The first syllables of his name suggest Doric *acha*, "roar." At the court of Lycomedes on the isle of Scyros, hidden among girls, he was called *Pyrrha* from his golden locks. He was educated by *Phœnix* the sun hero, was hot-headed, violent and a terrible fighter; his sulking in his tent after the death of *Patroklos* may be the survival of the couvade. The contest with the river *Scamander* shows his sun origin. Now though *Kalev* does no deed like this, *Kalevipoeg*, his reputed son, has a contest with *Lake Peipus*.

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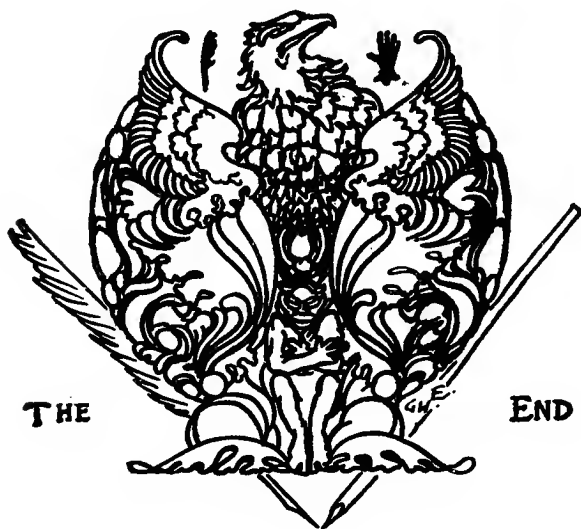
In such myths and legends we see an intimate blending of an animal and a human god, the bird representing that more archaic part of the double which descended from a very remote epoch, when the animal itself was worshipped and the idea of divine beings in the shape of man had not risen above the fear of the returning spirit of a magician. It seems impossible to believe that men who had once conceived of a well-ordered community of human gods on Olympus would have then evolved such barbaric and often repulsive stories about bird gods as we find in Greek mythology.

Everything points to such myths as survivals from a much ruder age. The parallel which may be drawn between, on the one side, Achilles and his son Pyrrhus (fire) and, on the other, the Finnish eagle that brings fire from heaven, seems to demand the early existence in Greece of a people akin in mental traits to Finnish tribes, a people that, so far from being driven out or cut off by the



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Greeks, remained in the land and gave important elements to Greek mythology. Similar phenomena are found in Italy, Scandinavia, Germany and the British islands; we find them also on the Nile and the Euphrates. They represent an early movement of the mind toward higher things. Their importance for a correct understanding of the origins of religion can hardly be overstated.







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